ゼロの使い魔
10
〈イーヴァルディの勇者〉
ヤマグチノボル
MF文庫
J

Novel Illustrations

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。

『カナリアー この思いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデビュー。著書に『グリーングリーン 緋ノ音ファンタスティック』『つっぱれ！有栖川』『魔法薬売りのマリア　千日カゲロウ』（角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『サンタ・クラリス・クライシス』（富士見ファンタジア文庫）『グリーングリーン 緋ノ音スタンドバイ・ミー』（MF文庫J）など多数。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be!?』『ゆきうた』『私立アキバ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

兎塚エイジ（うさつか・えいじ）

8月16日生まれ、大阪出身、大阪在住の大猫人。

絵柄、サラリーマンをしながらイラストを描かせて頂いてます。

イラスト仕事部は『遊ぶまえにいっしょ』『電撃文庫『ふみはるあこは』『電撃hp『ハンター君の冒険下剋上ヘン』『DA文庫『悪魔達の日常术』『富士見ドラゴンブック『ゼロの使い魔』シリーズ（MF文庫J 等です。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／blue

ゼロの使い魔10

イーヴァルディの勇者

ヤマグチノボル

ISBN4-8401-1766-7

C0193 ¥580E

9784840117661

1920193005806

定価：本体580円（税別）

メディアファクトリー

ゼロの使い魔10　イーヴァルディの勇者

才人は使い魔として異世界ハルケギニアに「召喚」されてしまった高校生。トリステインとアルビオンの戦いの後、ご主人さまであるルイズとともに学院に戻った彼は、女王アンリエッタから騎士に任命される。誰かに必要とされることで、才人は次第に「こっちの世界でみんなの力になりたい」という思いを強くしていく。ルイズは、態度こそ今までどおりに邪険にしながも、「サイトが一番幸せになる方法」を考え始めるが、敬愛するアンリエッタまでが才人を英雄視していることで、自分が才人に好かれているという自信が持てないでいた。一方、タバサは母を救い出そうと、単身母国ガリアへと向かい――。大人気の異世界使い魔ファンタジー、第10弾！

ヤマグチノボルの本

- **グリーングリーン** 緋ノ音スタンドバイ・ミー　［原作・監修／GROOVER　イラスト／くろたま舞台］
- **ゼロの使い魔**　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］
- **ゼロの使い魔2** 風のアルビオン　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］
- **ゼロの使い魔3** 始祖の祈祷書　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］
- **ゼロの使い魔4** 誓約の水精霊　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］
- **ゼロの使い魔5** トリスタニアの休日　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］
- **ゼロの使い魔6** 踊る炎の赤石　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］
- **ゼロの使い魔7** 銀の降臨祭　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］
- **ゼロの使い魔8** 望郷の小夜曲　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］
- **ゼロの使い魔9** 双月の舞踏会　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］
- **ゼロの使い魔10** イーヴァルディの勇者　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］
- **ゼロの使い魔外伝** タバサの冒険　［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔 10

〈イーヴァルディの勇者〉

ヤマグチノボル

＊INDEX＊

＊第一章
『オストラント』号 …… 11

＊第二章
エルフ …… 41

＊第三章
不安と嫉妬 …… 57

＊第四章
女王と騎士たち …… 86

＊第五章
兄弟 …… 109

＊第六章
囚われの六人 …… 121

＊第七章
過去の清算 …… 145

＊第八章
旧オルレアン邸 …… 167

＊第九章
アーハンブラ城 …… 186

＊第十章
イーヴァルディの勇者 …… 213

エピローグ …… 247

ギーシュ
ルイズのクラスメイトで、
水精霊騎士隊の隊長を
つとめる。
タバサ
無口な少女。魔法が得意。
アンリエッタ
トリステインの若き女王。
ルイズの幼馴染みでもある。
ルイズ
才人のご主人さま。
キュルケ
「火」系統の魔法を
得意とする、恋多き女。
シエスタ
騎士になった才人の
専属メイド。
才人
現代日本から召喚された、
ルイズの使い魔。

ゼロの使い魔10
イーヴァルディの勇者

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫
J

Chapter 1: The *Ostland*

“Huh...”

Louise let out a deep sigh. She was on the deck of the *Ostland*. In front of her eyes, led by Guiche and Malicorne, the students of the Academy of Magic were creating a commotion.

Colbert was in the center of the circle. Previously, they heard how he had died during the attack by a group of mercenaries from the Albion army; but he was actually alive, and apparently, Kirche had secretly brought him back to Germania.

It was a mystery why Kirche did that. Louise inclined her head.

“Oh my, Louise. How is this ship my Jean made?”

Her hand went around Louise, and Kirche smiled sweetly.

Louise stared at the wings of the *Ostland* which were protruding from its deck. They were enormous wings, which were about three times larger than the ones of normal ships. Usually, wings which are set up in ships were wood, like the support, with a spreading sail. But this ship was different. To achieve that strength, instead of wood, tall iron masts were used. Reaching 100 mails tall, these straight iron masts could not be produced in Tristain.

In the middle of the wings, there was an engine room with huge propellers! It looked like the “steam engine” Colbert prided in. Apparently, it was something Colbert and the Zerbst family made using the “Happy Little Snake” from some time before as a model. From their outer appearance, they looked like two long, huge iron boxes with massive chimneys. With the energy from the steam which was generated from the combustion of coal and the heating of water, these huge propellers revolved- this was its mechanism.

Those two things were the product of Germanian mechanics who were excellent

metallurgists.

“What a great ship.”

Louise expressed her thoughts briefly, and...

“To manufacture iron which could be of use to make such long and strong masts in Tristain is impossible! Louise, do you understand? For the sake of turning my Jean's design into reality, the fire technology of Germania is indispensable! It was a just like a fated meeting between the fire Zerbst and the Flame Serpent! In other words, the fruits of love!”

Unabashed, Kirche combed her hair back. Disgusted at Kirche who had now caught a teacher, calling him “My Jean," Louise said,

“So it's a teacher this time? You are really really someone who falls in love irrationally, huh?”

“It is my personality to be attracted to great gentlemen. I am only faithful to that.”

“Then why did you do things like lying about him dying and taking him away?”

Louise asked. At her words, Kirche displayed a somewhat lonesome look. Yet, she smiled immediately.

“There are a lot of reasons for adults. Complicated reasons.”

While waving her hand, she rushed over to Colbert.

Colbert was explaining the *Ostland* to the students.

“With the buoyancy acquired using these huge wings, the consumption of wind stones is minimized, and this ship should be able to travel for a long distance... uwa!”

Suddenly embraced by Kirche, Colbert let out a shout. Laughter escaped from the students. Saito was amongst the students. He was laughing quite innocently.

I know you are happy that he is still alive, but... Louise pouted.

Explain properly your kiss with princess.

Although when I was kissed during the drop, I thought, "Well, it's fine...", the kiss between Saito and Henrietta was still an uncommon relationship. Louise did not miss the hot atmosphere which drifted between the two. *Although I questioned Henrietta, I still don't know whether that feeling was real or not...* Louise declared. *Oh no! Because he had stopped the army of seventy thousand and became the hero of Tristain, looks like Henrietta's eyes are clouded as well.*

How would Saito react towards the Queen's feelings? Is Henrietta still better after all?

Louise recalled their kiss. *Henrietta and Saito were just like characters of a soap opera, having something hot residing in their looks. What eyes! Looks which were as if they had just noticed the sudden destiny which came to them without them knowing it.*

You had said so many times you like me that much, and yet what is thisssss~! Completely agitated, *Pong!* Louise kicked recklessly into the side of the ship.

“You are in a bad mood huh?”

Louise looked around, and saw Siesta standing there, holding a tray.

“Why are you here?”

With a voice similar to a snarl, Louise said. Nowadays, Siesta was Saito's exclusive maid. Right now, she was supposed to be cleaning the room.

“Because the students who had gathered said that they wanted to have their lunch on the ship. The workers carrying the meal are not enough, so I was called as well. Anyways, this is really an awesome ship, right? This is my first time seeing a ship with such long wings.”

Siesta was not aware of the incident involving Louise's attack by Myoznitnirn last night. And looks like she did not recognize this great ship, *Ostland,* which was made by Colbert who was living at Germania for some reasons, at all. With an innocent expression, her view shifted around restlessly from the deck to the mast and the wings.

The meal which was on the tray consisted of sliced bread, ham, and vegetables - a light meal. Louise took one of them, and started stuffing her mouth quietly.

Siesta whispered near Louise's ears,

“Was Miss Vallière found by Saito-san during the ball?”

Ugh! the bread she was eating got stuck at her throat. At her reaction, Siesta narrowed her eyes and whispered,

“Soooooo what's the maaatter? Oh my, oh my, oh my. Judging by that expression, looks like he did not, huh? If that's the case, I won the bet. If I won, that means...”

Siesta's face shone brightly.

“So I will borrow Saito-san for one day, right? As for Miss Vallière, please say that you have things to do and leave the room. It's all right! I won't do anything strange like Miss Vallière is thinking. I'll just practice a play, only that. A novel with the title 'A Maid's Afternoon,' just only practice one scene. So...”

However, Louise did not reply. While trembling, she was staring intently at a dot.

“Are you listening? Miss...”

Siesta recognized the target of Louise's gaze, and her eyes bulged.

“Isn't that Her Majesty, The Queen!?”

Just as she said, taking along some guards, Henrietta was about to go towards the students. In order for her to attend the Ball of Sleipnir, she had to stay at the Academy of Magic. Cheers could be heard from amongst the students who had gathered at the deck. Noticing Henrietta who had appeared suddenly, Colbert bowed deeply.

“A magnificent ship, right? Mister.”

“Thank you.”

Looking at the conversation between Colbert and Henrietta, Siesta sighed. The beauty of Henrietta which was described as “The Flower of Tristain” would stand out even amongst other noble ladies. The noble atmosphere drifted even to Siesta, a commoner, pressurizing her.

However... despite being in such a position, Henrietta still had this amiable feeling. Usually, noble ladies would always appear to be puffed up and aloof. Yet, Henrietta who reigned at the top did not make one feel like that. Was it because no one rivaled her?

“This is the first time I've seen Her Majesty, The Queen, so closely. If my family in my home town heard about this, they would definitely be envious...”

Yet, Louise did not respond. Motionless, her gaze was fixated straight ahead at Henrietta. *What on earth is wrong with Miss Vallière?* Siesta inclined her head. Eventually, her face lightened up. The person she liked was pushing his way among the crowd.

“Saito-san...”

Sure enough, it was Saito, wearing an Ondine mantle. Although Guiche's figure could be seen beside him, Siesta's eyes were only on Saito.

Guiche stepped up in front of Henrietta and bowed elegantly. Saito who was standing half a step behind followed suit, bowing down in an unrefined manner for a knight. The clumsiness which was brought up from amongst the commoners made Siesta's heart beat more.

“Your Majesty, the preparation of your coach is complete.”

With a respectful bow, Guiche said. Because of his delight in directly serving the queen he admired, he showed a proud look never seen before this. It was in stark contrast to Saito who looked embarrassed for some reason.

“Thank you for the trouble.”

She said so, and as if rewarding their work, held out her right hand. At such an action, Guiche froze.

“Guiche-san?”

“Oi...”

Saito prodded him lightly. Because of that, Guiche fell sidewards. Surprised, Henrietta took a step back.

“Wh-What happened?”

“He fainted.”

Saito said wistfully, and the other students who had gathered exploded into laughter.

Looks like Guiche was overcome by emotion and had lost consciousness.

“Well then, I will just express my gratitude to the Assistant Commanding Officer instead.”

Henrietta said in a slightly anxious tone. Around her, tension spread rapidly. Although Saito was a chevalier, he was still of a commoner origin (the truth was that he was a person of a different world). Previously, despite knowing that he was permitted to kiss Her Majesty's hand at Tristain, for him to do so right now before everyone's eyes, was something he could not even imagine, and this made him dizzy.

Saito involuntarily looked up at Henrietta's face, and blushed, lowering his head slightly. The surrounding noble students thought, *Aren't you a little too nervous in kissing the queen's hand?,* but that thing was reflected in Siesta's eyes as well. Squinting her eyes, she stared at the queen's and Saito's faces alternately.

".....Eh?"

From Siesta's mouth, a surprised sound leaked out. As might be expected of a girl in love, Siesta did not miss the hot feeling glimmering in Henrietta's eyes, even if it was only for a moment.

"H-How could this be? Don't tell me..."

Impossible, while thinking that, she turned towards Louise. Something grave was happening here as well. Clenching her fists tightly, with her face looking down, standing stiffly, she was murmuring something continuously.

"Miss? Miss?"

Siesta hastily shook Louise. From Louise's mouth which was mumbling something, curse-like words could be heard.

"Isn't he just a dog just a dog what is that supposed to mean that is impossible hey that's too rude anyway that's just not possible or should I say that Princess-sama has no morals she really has no morals I'm not serious or what am I joking or what this feeling is real or not I don't know I can't forgive them really can't forgive them they are just one stupid dog and a queen? That's just too funny really, reaaaaaaaally....."

"Miss! Miss!"

Paling, Siesta shook Louise harder.

“What!?”

“...That! That, what does it mean!?”

Whilst whispering softly, Siesta pointed at Henrietta and Saito.

“Whether it means this sort or that sort of thing, what you see is true.”

Siesta dropped to the ground clumsily.

“I can't believe it.”

“Even I don't believe it.”

Looks like Henrietta noticed Louise. Displaying a smile devoid of any ill will, she drew near her.

Behind her, with an expression as if he had done something wrong, Saito came as well. Guiche, who had come to, tagged along as well. Louise turned her back roughly against Saito's face, and greeted Henrietta awkwardly.

“I am going back to the palace after this... Before that, I would like to have a meal with you. Is that okay?”

“Be it okay or not okay, no objections. Just do as Your Majesty wishes.”

Henrietta laughed sweetly, after which she turned towards Saito.

“Would you like to join us as well?”

“That, that is... Gladly! Yes!” Guiche replied, standing stiffly. If Montmorency were present at that time, she definitely would not have hesitated to punish him with her magic.

Saito, however, shook his head apologetically.

“Sorry... I'm afraid I have some things to do for a bit.”

From the students who were watching him attentively, amazed voices could be heard. It was generally unimaginable for someone to turn down the invitation of a queen. Especially a lunch with the queen, a privilege which could not be

acquired even if nobles were to wish for it.

Henrietta displayed a seemingly lonely look for an instant, but immediately changed that with a smile.

“It's alright. After becoming a knight, you would be busy with various things.”

The queen and those invited for the lunch descended the *Ostland* successively. Guiche, Louise, Henrietta... Feeling that the help of a waiter was necessary, Siesta followed behind Louise as well.

After that, Saito, who was left behind, looked up towards Kirche and Colbert.

The people surrounding the two of them until a while ago could not really attend the lunch as well, but still followed the queen's party. Thanks to them, Colbert was released with difficulties.

“What's the matter, Saito? Why did you turn down the queen's invitation? Aren't you too proud?”

“I have something I would like to ask.”

“Yeah, yeah. I have something I want to ask as well. Who were both of you attacked by last night? Who was that?”

“I don't really know either.”

“What is that? After that, what happened to Tabitha? She had been with you guys last night, but today I didn't see her figure at all...”

"The person I want to ask is Tabitha.”

Saito told Kirche what happened last night.

Louise was attacked by a mysterious lady who called herself “Myoznitnirn,” and was consequently abducted. He had tried to go along to save her, and somehow

Tabitha started attacking him.

“Really?”

Kirche's eyes bulged.

“Yeah. But I couldn't hurt her. When I realized, I had already pointed the tip of my sword away. Though I received a blow at my stomach, she could not aim at my weak spots. So it was not a fatal wound.”

Saito removed his shirt, and showed the wound Tabitha inflicted on him last night. Thanks to the users of Water in the Knight Corps, the wound had closed up... but there were still traces left by the “Javelin” incantations.

“I don't know why she had a change of heart... but after that, she attacked that ally of hers until then. So, we rode on Sylphid together, and chased after the enemy which had carried Louise off, and were saved by the teacher.”

Kirche seemingly pondered on it... and turned her face around swiftly. And then, she started to run away.

“Kirche, where are you going?”

Saito and Colbert exchanged glances, and followed Kirche.

Kirche's destination was Tabitha's room in the tower of the dormitory.

Nonetheless, that was an empty shell. Tabitha's figure could not be seen anywhere at all. Kirche folded her arms, and started pondering about it. After that, she asked Saito, with a serious look,

“That girl, when did she come back to the academy?”

“Umm... ten days ago I think.”

Kirche frowned.

“Damn... If it's that girl, she won't say anything at all. Really fishy, huh?”

“What do you mean?”

“That girl went to Germania together with me, but... after confirming Jean's safety, she said “I'm going back,” and really came back.”

“Oi, oi! But, she just came back around ten days ago!”

“That's why! During that period, she must have received some 'mission' again. Dammit...”

“What do you mean by 'mission'!? Isn't she a quiet person? Oh yeah, she had also said...'I'll tell you the reasons after this fight.' Hey, Kirche! Tell me!”

Nnnnn~ Kirche placed her hand on her forehead.

“Well... It's inevitable that this fact is hidden from you for such a long time. Do you know that she is a Gallian?”

Saito nodded. He had heard it directly from Tabitha during their invitation for her to join the Knight Corps.

“She is not just a normal noble. That girl is a Gallian royalty.”

“Hah!? Royalty?”

“That's right.”

Kirche explained to Saito. The whole sad story of Tabitha studying abroad at Tristain Academy of Magic...

The younger brother of the ruling king, Duke of Orleans, who was Tabitha's father, was killed by people of the ruling king. To protect Tabitha, her mother drank poison, and became mentally ill.

And then, Tabitha was being sent to Tristain to study abroad, as if getting rid of her...

“But, what is the thing the Gallian royal family didn't allow...?”

Kirche bit her lips. In her usually taunting look, as if she was made to recollect that family line, fiery anger could be seen on her face.

“While treating her so poorly, troublesome incidents happened, forcing that girl.”

“...Troublesome incidents?”

“Still remember the Ragdorian incident?”

Saito recalled the incident at that beautiful Ragdorian lake. Depressing memories were revived. Wales' death... Henrietta's tears. And, the promise with the water spirit...

I had forgotten about the ring... After murmuring that, Saito lifted his face.

“Yeah, I remember. The fight with both of you.”

“That was also the command of the Gallian royal family.”

“Then, the attack on us yesterday...”

“Is most likely an order from the Gallian royal family as well.”

Anger surged in Saito's face.

“Unforgivable!!”

“Before that, shouldn't we worry about Miss Tabitha first?”

Colbert, who had been listening to their words silently until then, frowned seriously and spoke.

“She isn't in her room, could it mean that she was kidnapped...?”

Equally worried, Saito said. But Kirche shook her head.

“That girl won't be so stupid to be caught. She must've hidden herself, I think. Not bothering anybody. That girl is like that.”

“But still...”

“Eventually she'll get in touch with us, I think. It's best that we don't move around. Let's believe in her and wait.”

Staring outside the window, Kirche said. Saito was moved by the complete faith in her heart.

“Is it okay to tell Louise?”

Saito asked, and Kirche nodded.

“It's better to tell her. That girl is involved as well. Really respect her, becoming a legendary user... That Vallière carries too heavy a responsibility. 'Void', huh? Damn...”

“You knew it!?”

In a shocked voice, Saito cried out.

“During that time, when that handsome Albion prince was revived and abducted Princess-sama, Saito, didn't you say it yourself? 'I am just mimicking the legend.' But that incantation which Louise chanted to nullify the magic used to revive the dead... was not of the Four Elements of Magic. Legendary... and a magic not of the Four Elements. Isn't it 'Void'...? But looking at your behavior, seems that it is true.”

Kirche squinted her eyes, and smiled.

During that time, the queen and her party were having lunch at Louise's room. Although the staff of the academy with Old Osman as their lead suggested using the canteen, Henrietta refused by saying, “It's a personal affair.”

With that, a big table was hurriedly prepared in Louise's room, and seats specially for the queen's lunch were prepared.

At the prepared table, in the seat of honor with its back facing the window, sat Henrietta; at her right was Louise, followed by Guiche. As a waitress, Siesta stood behind, displaying a nervous expression. Serving the queen was something she had never even dreamed of. Siesta stole quick glances at Henrietta's face occasionally.

Recalling that burning look Henrietta had towards Saito some time ago... she

rolled her eyes. Seemingly, until now she still could not believe it.

Though she felt that Henrietta was listening to Guiche's words, apparently enjoyably, Henrietta would shoot an occasional, quick glance outside the window, and let out wistful sighs.

From such a look, doesn't Henrietta's affection look fairly deep? Suspicion was stirred within Louise's heart.

Yesterday night, I had accidentally blown my top and hit her... because I was not sure whether Henrietta's feeling was real or not. I was distressed for a while... to the extent that I thought I could not help but to strike her. Yet, what if that wasn't the case?

What if Henrietta's feelings were real?

What should I do?

For Louise who had believed since young that “Following Henrietta's will is a must”, thinking about that made her head go blank. Her brain refused to think about such things.

Troubled in such a manner, she noticed the things mixed in her food. The cuisine was a bird meat which was wrapped in a perfectly made pie crust, but when she cut it up with a knife, a slip of paper came out quickly.

“Please confirm the thing which I still don't believe until now.”

She turned around, and saw Siesta standing behind with a nervous expression. Apparently, the one who had concealed this note was this maid. Louise let out a sigh. She would probably want to know better whether Henrietta was serious or not. “I don't get it,” Louise murmured softly.

After her mutter, *The monologue right now, can Princess-sama hear it?* She became anxious. She stole a quick glance at the queen's face secretly. Henrietta was happy, but her mind had drifted far away. And Guiche was gazing at Henrietta's melancholic expression, like he was in a dream.

Fidgeting restlessly, as if urging Louise, Siesta unintentionally poked her back. Whenever that happened, Louise would turn back. Siesta was still obstinate, and

Louise stepped on her foot.

“Ouch!”

Siesta jumped.

“What's the matter?”

With a bewildered look, Henrietta stared at Louise and Siesta.

“N-Nothing at all!”

Louise crumpled the note Siesta wrote, and put into her pocket. Upon which, *claaannggg!*, Siesta dropped her tray.

When Henrietta who was thinking that the maid was up to something looked at her, pretending to pick up the tray, Siesta dived underneath the table, lifted up the tablecloth, and showed her face between Louise's legs.

Those lips moved slowly.

“P-l-e-a-s-e c-o-n-f-i-r-m i-t.”

Louise closed her thighs on Siesta's cheeks.

“Ugh, uh, ug, uhh, uughh...”

Henrietta's attention turned back to Louise again.

“What's wrong?”

In a tone as if she did not notice the disappearance of the maid at all, she said.

“Re-Really, nothing's wrong...” Whilst pinning Siesta's face with her thighs, Louise broke out in cold sweat.

Once again, Henrietta gazed wistfully outside the window. At a look it could be seen that she barely touched her food. Ah, Henrietta looked deeply in love.

Louise heaved a deep sigh.

Well then, what about Saito? When his lips met Henrietta's, Saito's expression brightened up. His looks were... feverish... Whether he will look at me with the same expression or not, right now I have not such self-confidence. What if Saito prefers Princess-sama over me...

Louise felt an outburst of anger.

Hey, Louise Françoise.

Don't you get it?

That dog had said he liked you he liked you, yet he betrayed his master, and wagged his tail at other girls.

Moreover, that person is Princess-sama.

Of everyone else, that person is my most valuable Henrietta, Her Majesty The Queen.

This is be-be-be-betr-betrayal!

As I thought, am I not being deceived by a kiss?

Be it this or that, she had become increasingly irritated. Unintentionally, she tightened her grip at Siesta with her thighs, at which Siesta let out an agonizing moan.

“Mi-Miss... A, ah... It hurts...”

At that moment,

The door opened, and a serious-looking Saito entered.

“Saito.”

“Saito-dono.”

“Saito-san.”

With different greetings and expressions due to his social positions, the three girls welcomed the sudden guest.

With furious eyes, Louise glared at Saito.

Appearing from under the table, with craving and loneliness blended together, Siesta greeted him with a very complicated-looking face. The feelings of the two ladies who were beings exalted beyond the clouds... Towards Saito who had obtained those, they felt both proud and incredulous... and also that their distance was pulled further apart.

“What's wrong? Don't you have some things to do?”

In this situation, the only person who did not welcome Saito's intrusion, Guiche, spoke. He had finally managed to dine with Her Majesty The Queen, only to have Saito disrupt the atmosphere.

Ignoring Guiche, Saito bowed at Henrietta once.

“Princess-sama.”

“What is it?”

Taken by surprise, even now, Henrietta's cheek reddened slightly, although it was to an extent which was imperceptible apart from Louise and Siesta... Henrietta sensed the trembling in her heart, and closed her lips tight into a straight line.

However, at Saito's next words, Henrietta's blushed disappeared from her cheeks, which paled instantly.

“I know the identity of Louise's attackers.”

“WHAT!?”

Everyone in the room opened their eyes wide.

Saito relayed the words he heard from Kirche some time ago to everyone in the room. As for the parts with insufficient explanations, Kirche and Colbert who

had come along with Saito, provided further clarification.

“How can this be? Gallia...”

As if stating her disbelief, Henrietta shook her head.

“But unmistakably, this seems like the doing of Gallia. So we have to...”

Painfully, Saito added.

“Because there's no way Tabitha would attack me.”

“That girl went through a lot of hardships as well...” Kirche shook her head.

Henrietta was pale. Prime Minister Mazarin's words rang in her head again.

“We have to be careful with Gallia's attitude.”

The reason Gallia was satisfied with only a harbor during the division of the lands of Albion, was now understood. Gallia's true target was “Void," the legendary ability.

She did not know what Gallia planned to do once they acquired the power of “Void." Was it a scheme of King Joseph? Or was it the dogma of some influential nobles...? Either way, it was indubitably a bad scheme.

With anger in his eyes, Saito told Henrietta.

“Princess-sama. Please let me go to Gallia.”

“Saito.”

Louise tried to reprove him, but Saito continued his words without listening.

“I don't know who did this and where they're from, yet there are these people who did such cruel things to Tabitha, abducted Louise, and tried to kill me, right? I will find them, and teach them to never even think about repeating such things!”

Guiche let out an astonished voice.

“Embark on a journey to Gallia!? Oi, oi, this will become a war!”

“What is this, Guiche!? You are the Commanding Officer right? The Assistant Commanding Officer was injured, won't you go and take revenge?”

Dissatisfied, Saito said.

“Well, take revenge is uhh, I am not reluctant but... the other side is a foreign country. When we, the Knight Corps, go there, it would not be so easy to clear up by mere fighting.”

At Guiche's words, Henrietta nodded as well.

“Saito-dono, I understand your feelings... but what Guiche-dono said is true. Now you are Tristain's knight. This looks like a trap into which you will fall in easily.”

“But...”

Seemingly frustrated, Saito bit his lips.

“For the time being, please leave this to me. I wonder if we have anything to be served as evidence...”

“There are fragments from the gargoyles.”

Louise held out her hands. It was a fragment from the gargoyle which had attacked Saito and her last night. That was something which was scattered about the garden of the academy and the outdoor field.

“Right. If we get a proof that that is something made in Gallia, I would call the ambassador and protest strongly.”

“How could this be? And I have gotten hold of the true identity of the enemy with such troubles!”

Saito persisted further. Henrietta grasped Saito's hands tightly.

“Please. I do not want to let you people experience anything dangerous. The person someone values the most... I can't bear to see that person injured again.

When you understand that, you'll see that this nation as a whole is protecting you people from Gallia, who's plotting evil schemes.”

As if being struck at the heart by Henrietta's words, Guiche knelt reverentially.

“Your Highness... I consecrate this life of mine to Your Highness. Your Highness' childhood friend, Miss Louise, is the same as well. Even if I have to exchange my life, I would not let the enemy lay even a finger on both of you.”

“Thank you very much, Guiche-dono.”

Henrietta smiled, after which she turned towards Saito.

“Please promise as well. By no means, never do anything dangerous.”

There was something solemn mixed in that voice.

Saito noticed that Henrietta's eyes were a little wet. *Don't pay attention to that!...* Saito murmured in his thoughts.

He looked at Henrietta's eyes which were about to overflow with tears... and he felt as if he must stay beside her to protect her, and that he must do what she says. And to think that he had been thinking of proceeding to get Louise's attackers after clearly identifying the true identity of the enemy.

His flaming fervor was splashed with cold water. Saito bit his teeth hard. As if asking for help, he looked at Louise... Louise puffed her cheeks up, and avoided Saito's eyes.

Looks like she is still very cross with what happened last night. Well, it's understandable, since she witnessed the touching of lips between Henrietta, the one she adores, and me, her familiar.

But... does Louise have any right to be angry at me?

Saito's heart denied strongly. *No, not at all.*

Saito had said he liked her to such an extent, and yet Louise had never said “I like you” even once. He had said he liked her so many times, even if there was once when he lied, but that's still alright.

As I thought, in Albion, when she said 'Reward,' did she really mean it? Saito was hurt. *A sweet bait in order to fasten me, her familiar, to herself...*

Where is the sweet bait? Looking at Louise's body which had little humps, Saito whispered in his heart.

Sweet bait huh... As he was thinking about this, he noticed Henrietta who was before his eyes. Covered by her dress, Henrietta's body was rich with absolutely ladylike curves. Although it was not to Tiffania's extent, her cleavage which peeked out of the sufficiently large breasts, flew into his sight. The feeling of that cleavage still remained in his hands.

At the same time, Saito remembered the kiss, and his cheeks reddened.

His usual firm expression... and his ecstatic expression when he sought girls - these gaps became the mainstream of appeal, which engulfed him.

At that... No matter what, Saito's heart confused. *I love Louise. That truth is supposed to be unshakable...* Unintentionally, Henrietta's face floated into his mind.

To lose someone you love, do you feel only loneliness?

If one thinks about it calmly, that's the case.

Yet... what if, what if that was not the case?

How did her heart change at that time? Even she did not know. But... there is only one thing I am sure of.

Nobody knows Henrietta's true self.

There is no being who knows the true self of this young queen with her firmness broken down.

No one knows her extremely weak true self as a young lady.

Even if it is Louise... she probably didn't know it as well.

The real Henrietta is merely an ordinary girl dressed in multiple-layered and

pricey chiffon. If she kisses, she would blush; if she embraces, she would bury her face in the other party's chest. Her breasts and cheeks, all of them are soft... She is this fragile lady.

More... I want to see her former face more. Her face before the kiss, what on earth does it look like? Such a notion flashed past his mind... but Saito shook his head.

Somehow, he thought that it was something very wrong.

But still, this guilty conscience was also because of Henrietta's charm. Although he felt that it was wrong, he still drowned in it - this queen had such a charm. He felt like if he kept on looking, he would be beside himself. Saito averted his eyes.

Standing at a place slightly further away, with cold eyes, Louise and Siesta were staring intently at Saito and Henrietta, who had their heads down. Siesta seemingly felt too overcome by jealousy.

“T-To win Her Majesty the Queen's heart, as I thought, Saito-san is cool...”

Siesta said such things because of her fascination, and Louise tread her feet.

“Hyaaa!”

“Don't say unnecessary things.”

“But, Her Majesty the Queen's face... That is the expression of someone in love. Even I, as a girl, am fascinated by her charm. I am involuntarily captivated... Ouch!”

Siesta was pinched by Louise at her cheek, and she shrieked.

“Princess-sama is only deluded.”

“Deluded...?”

“That's right. Newly born ducklings would regard the first thing they see as their parent.”

“Interesting words.”

“Princess-sama is the same. When she had lost Wales-sama and became depressed, she had coincidentally met that dog, only that. Because of this, by all means, I must save Princess-sama from the hands of this PERVERTED dog.”

“You are not frank huh... If you honestly say you don't want him to be taken away, Miss Vallière would be a little cuter... Ouch!”

Siesta was pinched harder by Louise at the cheek.

“Don't you get it? That dog, after kissing, he would be bad and lewd. That time when we were on the boat, after touching my buttocks, and with those hand movements, he even ca-ca-ca-ca-ca-ca-ca-caressed me to the top. When I imagine him doing that to Princess-sama, somehow the entire world is unforgivable. Because I would never allow him to contaminate my Princess-sama. By any chance, if he had contaminated her, that day would be the day he dies.”

“Hand movements? I still remember them well... Hyaaa!”

The ending was that Louise pinched Siesta's ass. *Hyaah! Aagghh!* Whilst groaning, Siesta jumped up into air, but Saito and Henrietta were engrossed in their own world, and did not notice her. The ever joyous Guiche mistook Henrietta's furiously blushing face as a response to his loyalty, and, overcome by emotion, had fainted long ago.

Kirche leaned flirtatiously against Colbert and said.

“It's really peaceful, rrrriiiiggggghht Jean?”

Staring at the scene before him with a troubled face, Colbert perspired.

“Oh well, after all, this is a brief rest. Isn't it good? By the way, Miss Zerbst, umm... can you not use 'Jean,' please?”

Smiling sweetly, Kirche kissed Colbert on his cheek.

“N.O. And yeah, I have already asked many times. Just call me 'Kirche.'”

Chapter 2: The Elf

Along Ragdorian Lake, which was situated on the border between Gallia and Tristain, in front of an old-looking house nearby, a blue-haired girl who was riding a wind dragon alighted.

Although the Gallia royal family's crest could be seen at the door of the residence, it was humiliated by an unsightly cross-shaped dent. This was the house in which Tabitha's mother lived quietly... It was the premise of an ex-Orleans residence.

Tabitha pondered about the contents of the letter which she had torn up completely last night. It was a letter with the Gallia royal family's seal. Something short was written inside:

“Charlotte Hélène Chevalier de Parterre. Deprivation of your title as my right-hand assistant, Chevalier, and your social status. PS: The aforementioned person's mother, ex-Duchess of Orleans, is restrained. For bail negotiations to be approved, within a week, the aforementioned person must be present at the ex-Duke of Orléans' official residence.”

“Bail negotiations” is an extremely mild expression. Tabitha was certainly not deceived. In other words, it means “Because your mother has been made a hostage, surrender peacefully!” After that, a trial against Tabitha's treachery would probably begin. The result would be... if she is lucky, the gallows. If not... she did not really want to think about it.

Together with the refreshing breeze of the morning, the sunlight of spring made fun of her face. In an instant, that refreshing breeze became a freezing, icy aura, as Tabitha took a step forward into the residence.

Sylphid, who was sitting down, let out a worried sound: *”Kyui!”*

“Do you intend to surrender peacefully? Those eyes were asking.

“Chill.”

Facing the front, she told that to her faithful familiar, upon which *“Tsush, tsush...”* Sylphid drew nearer to her.

Tabitha turned back, and stopped Sylphid.

“Wait. I'll finish this soon.”

Sylphid shook her head.

This wise dragon understood. Her master obviously did not have any intention to surrender. She intended to fight, and recover her mother. Naturally, Gallia's royal government should not have thought that Tabitha would hand over her wand peacefully. To win over that wind magic, they would have definitely prepared many powerful users.

Because of her betrayal, there was absolutely no reason whatsoever for them to continue using Tabitha. Since the start, the royal family had been wanting to dispossess Tabitha of her life. However, if she were to be murdered with her father as well, it would result in the ex-Duke of Orleans' formal faction being enraged. Consequently, they assigned dangerous tasks to her, thinking that she would be disposed of that way.

Yet, Tabitha managed to accomplished those tasks well. The current king's faction should be certainly impatient now.

This time... was the chance for them to deliver their full potential to kill her.

Sylphid noticed the unpleasant atmosphere enveloping the house. That air had a chilly sensation as if pricking one's skin, and Sylphid's scales were agitated.

“You understand, don't you? From now on the fight would proceed. In the same, usual way, wait for me in the air.”

Slyphid never joined Tabitha in battle. She always used the reason that "You need something that can bring you back home, right?" and stayed in the air meekly waiting for her master to complete her battle.

However, this time was different.

Tabitha's enemy was the royal family of Gallia.

This was an opponent on a completely different level than the beasts, mages, or demihumans whom she fought against until then.

A kingdom against a person; no matter how she struggled, she had no chance of winning.

This ex-Orleans residence was already not the place of Tabitha's dear memories.

Nor was it the battleground.

It was a place where the executioner, who was dispatched to kill her, was waiting; her coffin, her grave.

If it were a “battlefield,” it would still be okay; but her beloved master must not venture alone into this “cemetery.”

Tabitha gazed firmly at Sylphid, who was staring at her with those brave eyes.

In a soft, instruction-like voice, Tabitha said.

“Because you are waiting, I can fight. Because I have a place to return to, I can fight.”

Although Sylphid was motionless for a while... her eyes brimmed with tears, she nodded hard.

“Kyui!”

Gently, Tabitha stroked Sylphid's snout. Firmly, Sylphid raised her face, and soared to the sky.

Gazing at Sylphid which was circling the sky above the residence, with the same expression as usual, “Thank you,” she whispered.

The door to the entrance hall was not locked.

Tabitha pushed it, *Giiiiiiiii*...Making a heavy sound, the door opened.

Usually, the butler, Percerin, would leap towards her, but... apart from the deadly silent and cold atmosphere, nothing else greeted her. There were supposed to be servants in the residence, but there wasn't the slightest indication of any human's presence.

Taller than her, she casually held her rough and knobby staff, and Tabitha slowly faced the interior of the residence.

She had her usual expression, her usual movements, but Tabitha's anger changed the atmosphere around her.

She walked down the long corridor leading to her mother's living room in the interior of the residence, and... the doors at the left and right of the corridor opened simultaneously.

At the same time the doors opened, arrows flew out simultaneously. Unperturbed, Tabitha waved her staff.

*Piiiiinnnnggggg!!*The sound of water vapor spreading outwards in the air could be heard, as an ice barrier materialized around Tabitha, repelling the arrows.

As if greeting those arrows, subsequently, from the opened doors, soldiers jumped out. Yet... at a closer look, wielding swords, those were not humans.

Granted with a will, they were magic puppets, gargoyles.

Approached at a close range by 10 fearless and firm gargoyles, normal mages would not be able to deal with them.

However, Tabitha's magical power right now swelled with anger.

Holding her staff up high, the countless ice arrows at her surrounding just now which shone a pale color, revolved. Her short hair also fluttered intensely due to the tornado which sprang forth, with her as the center.

A “Windy Icicle” of speed and power never displayed before this, pierced

through the 10 gargoyles at the same time... and blew them away.

Because of the magic contained in the Windy Icicles, the gargoyles which had been pierced through, turned into ice in an instant. This was the result of the surging magical power seeking its destination.

With an intense fury even she did not notice herself, Tabitha's rank went up one level.

The second power of Wind, and second power of Water were residing in her specialty, “Windy Icicle”.

Right now, normal user should not be able to fight her.

With her experience as the secret knight of Gallia, the Knight of North Parterre, and her furious Wind square spell, this petite blue-haired girl had become a prominent warrior even in the whole of Halkeginia.

Tabitha stood in front of her mother's room, and turned the knob.

It was not locked.

The double-sided door swung back casually.

A bed and a small desk could be seen. On top of the bed, her mother's figure was absent.

The window was open, and spring breeze blew in.

There were bookshelves at the surrounding of the wall... A man was standing there.

Clad in a pale, light brown robe, he was a tall and thin man. He was wearing a hat of a foreign country, with a wide flange and a feather on top of it. From the bare parts of his hat, golden hairs hung down until his waist. With his back facing the entrance to the room where Tabitha was standing, he was facing the bookshelf at the wall, and was apparently doing something enthusiastically.

The sound of pages flipping could be heard. To her astonishment, the man was seemingly reading a book. She had never heard of any assassin who turned his

back towards his enemy and read a book.

Facing that back, Tabitha spoke softly.

“Where did you take my mother to?”

Like a librarian who was called out to, the man turned in a completely ordinary gesture, without the slightest indication of any bloodthirst or hostility.

“Mother?”

Like a glass chime, it was a high-pitched, clear voice.

The pupils of those slit eyes shone in a light blue color. He had extremely lovely, fine features. Nevertheless, his age could not be told at all. Although he appeared to be like a lad, one would still believe him if he said he were 40 years old- he had this sort of mysterious air about him.

“Where did you take my mother to?”

With the exact intonation, Tabitha repeated. Looking troubled, the man gazed at the book, but... opened his mouth again.

“Aah. The woman the Gallian troops took into custody is it? I don't know their destination.”

If that's the case, you are of no use to me, As if saying that, Tabitha waved her staff casually. Windy Icicles attacked the man at his chest.

However, Tabitha's ice arrows stopped exactly in front of the man's chest. There wasn't any sign that he had recited a spell.

The stopped arrows dropped onto the bed, and broke apart into fragments.

It was the feeling that the arrows had lost their force due to a wall. What on earth is the magic power this guy uses?

Tabitha lifted her staff cautiously. She thought of examining the opponent's moves.

“This 'story' is wonderful.”

The man's next move took Tabitha by surprise. Somehow, the man had retrieved the book he was previously reading from the bookshelf.

“As for us, we don't have such culture. “Books” are limited to the recording of accurate phenomena, history, and research contents. Adding up personal interpretation to the history and making it fun to read, arousing the feelings of the reader, causing him to slip into the author's point of view... Something interesting.”

The man in the robe of a foreign country informed Tabitha in a voice without any implication of hostility.

“This “Hero of Ivaldi” story... have you read it before?”

The moment that man reverted his sight back to the book, Tabitha released Windy Icicles towards him again. This time, it was twice the previous amount.

Yet... as expected, the ice arrows lost their force before the man's hand, and dropped onto the bed.

Not worrying about Tabitha's spell at all, the man continued his words.

“Oh my, your people's “story” is really interesting. And you are against us in the matter of religion... But our only saint is also a hero to you people.”

Shades of anxiety began to show up on Tabitha's face. She did not understand why her ice arrows stopped half way. Some sort of wind magic? She had neither seen nor heard of such a magic element.

Then Tabitha realized.

Magic element?

There is another element of magic which exists in this world.

As the Knight of the North Parterre, the spells used by the demihumans she had fought many times before...

“Ancient magic...”

With an extremely mysterious face, the man muttered.

“Why do you barbarians call us in such an unrefined way?”

After that, in a voice which hid nothing,

“Ah, or maybe you had mistaken me to be a barbarian? Sorry. It is manners to remove my hat at the first meeting with you barbarians.”

Saying that, the man removed his hat.

“I am the Bidashal of “Neftes”. I am grateful for this meeting.”

From the blond hair... long pointed ears protruded.

“Elf.”

Tabitha squeezed out an astonished sound from her throat.

That man was an elf.

Staying at the outspread desert at the east of Halkeginia, a race that had long life.

A race which boasts of many-fold history and civilization compared to the humans.

The dreadful warriors who were users of the powerful ancient magic.

Tabitha grasped her staff tightly.

Even for the Knight of the North Parterre Tabitha, who had fought with various types of enemies, there were two opponents she did not want to meet. One of them was dragons. For a human to fight against a mature dragon, the danger was far too great. The dragons' flame power and vitality easily surpassed her magic powers.

And, the other one was elves, the one standing in front of her eyes right now.

First time seeing an elf, Tabitha was struck with wonder... and subsequently terror. According to rumors, their magic powers were extraordinary. Anyhow, her Windy Icicles could not reach him at all...

“I have a request of you.”

In a pitiful voice, the man who had called himself “Bidashal of Neftes” told Tabitha.

“Request?”

“Yeah. My request is that you do not resist. We elves don't like useless battles. Despite your intentions, I must take you back to Joseph. Because I had promised that. That's why, if you can, I want you to come along with me peacefully.”

At her uncle's name, Tabitha's blood flowed backwards.

How could you be afraid? You had decided to bring back your mother! Whether it is an elf, or a god, I cannot stop here.

While fear faded away from her heart, tempestuous storm filled her once again.

Magic power is willpower.

Willpower is feelings.

The power of the strong feelings influences the total amount of the magic power.

In the midst of her fury and agitation, that part of her which was freezingly cold like ice-cold snow, taught Tabitha to increase the power of her element.

Tabitha starting reciting a Triangle spell which possessed Square power.

“Raguuzu Wootaru Isu Iisa Hagaraasu...”

For an instant, the air around Tabitha shook, and froze.

The lump of frozen air revolved around her body like countless snake-like objects.

Combining both the beauty of the art formed by ice and wind interweaving each other, and the sharpness which would split anything which touches it into two, the “Ice Storm” appeared.

Buuuooo, buuuooooo, buuruoooooooooooo!

Smashing the interior of the room, the “Ice Storm” raged about.

The eye of the storm shifted from her body to her staff.

At the same time, aiming at the demihuman, she swung down her staff. Those things were done within the split of a second.

Apparently, no matter what defence magic was employed, he would be blown away in one strike.

Yet... The blond, tall elf completely ignored the furious “Ice Storm” which was plunging towards him.

His gaze did not shift from Tabitha at all.

Neither hostility nor anger could be sensed from those fine pupils.

Tabitha recognized the true meaning of that thing residing in the elf's pupils, and was astonished.

Somehow, that thing inside was “constraint”.

And the magic attack which possessed the Square power was going to attack him... Until now, the elf did not even see Tabitha as an enemy.

The elf's body was shrouded by the “Ice Storm”... At that instant when this seemed the case,

The revolution of the ice storm reversed abruptly.

Just like that, preserving the same amount of force, it rushed back to Tabitha.

“Iru Furu Dera...”

In a moment, with the “Fly” spell, Tabitha flew and tried to evade it.

Tabitha who was rich with battle experience, completed her incantation in an instant.

Release.

At the moment she was about to fly off, Tabitha's eyes opened widely.

I can't fly!

Without her noticing, her legs were kept down by the bed. The bed which had become like clay, grasped Tabitha's ankles firmly.

Dumbstruck, Tabitha murmured.

“Ancient elves...”

She could not finish her words.

Tabitha was completely swallowed by the “Ice Storm” she made, and lost her consciousness.

Tabitha who had tumbled down, worn-out, was approached by Bidashal. Tabitha's petite body was inflicted with countless wounds because of the ice blades she made herself. Blood from her wound mixed with water, making a terrible mess on the blanket of the bed.

Bidashal lay his hand at the collapsed Tabitha's neck. She was barely alive.

“O water which flows from this body...”

The tall elf started reciting a spell in a clear voice. The magic which had been called by Halkeginians as “Ancient”, was known by the elves and demihumans who use it as the “power of the spirits”.

As if being painted over with paints, the wounds on Tabitha's body were healed. Compared to the “Healing” element magic, the healing of her wounds was faster.

Bidashal cautiously lifted up Tabitha whose wounds were healed.

He looked outside the window, and noticed a Wind Dragon looking at him. Evidently, this was the familiar of the lady who was just defeated. Those eyes were glittering with anger.

Because of those eyes, Bidashal realized that Sylphid was no ordinary Wind Dragon.

“Rhyme Dragon huh....”

He guessed Sylphid's true identity immediately.

Rhyme Dragons could be said to be extinct breed. A mythical beast with high intelligence, possessing Ancient Magic, and excelled in sprachgefühl (speech and language).

The unconscious lady in his arms... To make a Rhyme Dragon as her familiar, it should take her a great deal of skill. If she was not recognized as a master during the “Contract”, it would possibly be dangerous.

“Rhyme Dragon. I have no intention to fight against you. “The Great Purpose” did not wish for me to fight you as well.”

“The Great Purpose” was... the general concept believed by the elves, Rhyme Dragons... the Ancient inhabitants of Halkeginia. They existed with the source which was called “the power of the spirits”, something which determined their respective actions... It was something like a god to the humans.

Despite “The Great Purpose”, this Rhyme Dragon before his eyes did not pull back. On the contrary, as if gathering courage, started roaring.

This dragon knew what “fear” was. Whilst aware of his hidden ability as a user of the “power of the spirits”, which was many times more, she bared her fangs.

“You went as far as selling your soul to barbarians? Familiar, what pathetic existences.”

At the same time Bidashal muttered this, Sylphid broke through the wall, and flew to him.

However, Bidashal's expression did not change one bit. He merely raised his hand towards Sylphid.

It was bizarre for such a thin elf to stop the huge dragon with only one hand. Sylphid tried to struggle... but could not move.

The magic power was too strong.

Bidashal held his left hand over Sylphid's head. Slowly... Sylphid's eyelids closed.

Dooonnn! Looking down at the Rhyme Dragon which had lost its consciousness and fallen on the bed, Bidashal murmured.

“O “Great Purpose”... Please forgive such a foolish use of the “power of the spirits”.”

Chapter 3: Anxiety and Jealousy

Louise's room was as usual, enveloped in strange anxiety.

After classes, Saito was having tea with Louise, but... the waitress, Siesta was trying her best to incite Louise with her attitude.

“Saito-san, please.”

Whilst smiling sweetly, Siesta served Saito a freshly baked biscuit. As if saying that that was her seat, Siesta sat down beside him.

“Th-Thank you...”

Timidly, Saito checked Louise's expression.

With an utterly sullen face, Louise glared at both of them fiercely. Her anger turned into dark waves and struck Saito.

Saito did not want to call out to Louise in this state.

Why are you angry?

You don't really like me, do you?

You had merely said “Reward,” why are you angry?

Yet, it was no use talking about it. Because she would be wounded if he were to say that right to her face, so he didn't get his words out. Whether Saito had become a Chevalier or a noble, to Louise he was still but a familiar. Be it Louise whom he met someday in front of the fake grave, or Louise on the bed at Westwood Village who was so cute, in the end it was still but a love towards her familiar.

Don't you get it, Saito?

Saito warned himself.

Louise is occasionally gentle, but... she still doesn't love you.

Saito's master was, at any rate, serious. Because of her seriousness, she tried her best to accomplish her duties, and had dedicated her body and her heart towards Henrietta to whom she swore loyalty since young until now.

Because she was serious.... she treated her familiar as really valuable, and occasionally would tell him to do his best and allow him to kiss her; those were probably not rewards, but she did not get angry when he touched her breasts; and had accidentally allowed him to go as far as her body. Recently, she had started saying things like “I will find a way for you to return home.” His strength was probably necessary for Louise to accomplish her aspirations, and yet she had turned away from that, and continually considered Saito's happiness.

Yeah.

Anyhow, Louise is a serious person.

Saito loved such a serious Louise.

But still... Louise didn't love me. If she loved me, because she had been confessed to such an extent, she would have said “I like you.” at least once. No matter how I think about it, that was the case. And yet, she did not say that at all...

A serious, and significantly foolish, honest Louise. She had allowed me to such an extent, yet did not say those words at all... she really did not like me, huh.

Her jealousy was after all, her desire to possess her familiar.

It was at most a puppy love, Saito felt devastated.

“What's wrong?”

He looked beside him, and saw Siesta gazing at him with a worried face. If one thought about it... the one who invariably always showered him with love was only Siesta.

Well then, how about Henrietta?

Saito shook his head.

She was only lonely. She was lonely, and did not have anyone else to rely on, and had merely leaned onto him who was there by chance. Cheer up, Saito. Geez, all noble ladies are so self-conceited... Saito murmured grumpily.

“Noble ladies are.... what's with them?”

“Eh? Nah....”

“Putting that aside, look. Please open your mouth. Aaahh, ahhhh...”

Siesta pushed a biscuit into Saito's mouth. The moment he tried to open his mouth reflexively, *Piiiinkk!*, the sound of a cup breaking could be heard.

Looking at the other side, Saito shivered.

Louise was holding the fragments of the cup in her mouth. Evidently, it was broken by her mouth.

“Y-You, don't break your cup. It's dangerous.”

Completely ignoring Saito's words, she pushed the fragments of the cup towards Siesta. In a contemptuous voice,

“Another cup.”

“Yes yes,” Siesta stood up, and refilled a cup which was left with a little cold tea. Smiling sweetly, she held that out towards Louise.

“Please. ♪”

Louise glared at Siesta fiercely.

“Make a new cup of tea! You're really a useless maid, huh. The only thing you can do, is to look at the dog flirtatiously. If you can't even make a cup of tea, y-you better go back to your hometown.”

Without the least drop in her smile, Siesta emptied the contents of the teapot. As

she was trying to put new tea leaves into the pot, she noticed that the tea leaves had expired, and made a troubled look.

And then, *pan!* She clasped her hands as if she had just realized something, and rushed out. After about 5 minutes, she had gathered some weeds in her hands.

Humming a tune, she put them into the pot, spread them about and poured hot water in again. Filling the cup with water from the teapot, she served Louise in an excessively polite manner.

Louise silently poured it on Siesta's head. Siesta displayed a broad smile, produced a handkerchief, and wiped her face slowly. After that, as if wanting to refill the tea in the pot, she poured the tea onto Louise's head.

The two were gazing at each other with smiling faces, but soon a scuffle broke out between them. Saito became very miserable, and in a soft voice, said, “Stop.” But, grasping each other's hair, baring their teeth, both of them were entangled in each other.

Aah... Geez...

Even though they had attacked each other recently, it was peaceful.

As for Saito, now that he had recognized the true identity of the enemy, he wanted to leave the place to bring justice. *What? It doesn't mean that this will become a war.* As for the opponent, although he did not know whether it would be the king of Gallia, or the cabinet minister, or the general, or some great nobles, he wanted to see them, and openly ask "What the heck did you want to use Louise for!"

But... I was stopped by Princess-sama. Oh well, I can see her point. Recently, the war finally ended, and she did not want to create another flash point.

But still, she had said that she could do something with their diplomacy... No matter how much evidence she shows, if the other side says, “We don't know anything about it,” the matter would probably end there.

And we had finally known the mastermind; I want to do something! It was just like an arrow which was shot with full force, and yet could not hit the target. He was feeling depressed.

If I had not become a knight, I could probably move more freely.

No... Saito shook his head.

Because I am a knight of Tristain... isn't this some sort of excuse?

Whether I am a knight of Tristain or not, once I am able to locate the enemy precisely... I should take action.

Yeah.

The reason I became so gloomy is because of myself.

At that time when he was stopped by Henrietta, to tell the truth, Saito was relieved.

Because of that, he wouldn't poke his head into something dangerous; he was relieved. His opponent was the kingdom of Gallia... Wasn't it the country which defeated Albion with one shot, cornering them?

I am not going to the country of such people. His relief came into his mind accidentally.

How useless. What knight?... Saito became miserable.

Contrary to Saito's misery, in front of his eyes, Louise and Siesta were in the midst of their scuffle.

Becoming increasingly depressed, without thinking, Saito opened his mouth and accidentally said something forbidden.

“You two, at least follow Princess-sama and be more graceful...”

Louise and Siesta's movements stopped abruptly.

Suddenly, the atmosphere in the room changed.

Saito felt something chilly trickle down his spine.

Because of his instincts, he knew that he was in danger. He trembled.

Uuuuuunnnnn, Louise started doing warm-up exercises. With her arms akimbo, Siesta started bending backwards as well.

“Siesta. You hold him down tightly, okay?”

“Gladly, Miss Vallière.”

Saito stood up fearfully.

“Well then, I will be going to train the knight corps now. Louise, I'll leave the rest to you. Siesta, the tea was nice. Thank you.”

Even after struggling, he still could not leave. He was seized by Siesta at his arms, and Louise, at his feet. Falling onto the bed, Saito looked up to both their faces, close to tears, and asked.

“Two times?”

“Hmm...”

With an extra large smile on their faces, Louise and Siesta said.

“Four times.”

After being thoroughly bashed up by both the mage and the maid, Saito laid on the bed, senseless. Louise was sitting on top of him, with her elbow on his body. Standing beside, "Haaah…", Siesta let out a sigh.

“Lately, I have become more and more like Miss Vallière huh.”

“Thank you,” Louise said softly.

“I’m not really praising you.”

In a tired voice, Siesta said. After that, she squatted, and whilst poking Saito’s face gently,

“…Umm, Miss Vallière.”

“What?”

“This is not the time for us to quarrel. Really, what should we do?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Her Majesty The Queen! Those eyes! Miss Vallière saw it as well right? Aah, if the opponent is Miss Vallière, then at least…”

“At least what? At least what? At least what?”

Louise kept poking Siesta around with her wand. "Yoyoyo…" Siesta fell onto the bed, but obstinately Louise still continued poking her.

“Hey maid. You’re sneering right? You’re sneering at a noble?”

“Excuse me! I’m not sneering! Well… Miss Vallière is charming enough, but… if you think about it calmly, the opponent is Her Majesty The Queen. It’s no point dreaming or hoping anymore!”

“Whhhhhyyyy??”

“Can’t she do what she want!? Ah, surely, the free times he served as a knight are not enough. Sooner or later she will order him to go to the castle for duties… And then, night after night…”

“Night after night what!?”

Siesta put her hand under the fainted Saito’s side, and lifted him up slowly. And then, just like the strings of a puppet, she mimicked Saito’s speech.

“Yo! I’m Saito!”

“What’s that?”

“I want to express the violence that Her Majesty The Queen would probably do to Miss Vallière in a drama-like way.”

“…Please go ahead.”

Siesta moved Saito’s hands skillfully, and operated him.

“Yaa. I’m Saito-san. I love Siesta!”

“Don’t say such strange lies.”

“This is part of the script for the play.”

With a composed face, Siesta continued.

“I’m Saito-san. Louise has flat chest, too flat!”

“What the heckkk?”

“Well, I’ve said that this is the script of the play.”

“You, whether it is the depiction of Princess-sama’s violence, or the expression of your true feelings, choose quickly! I’m going to use magic now!”

“I understand,” Siesta muttered, and began the play.

“I’m Saito-san. Today, I was called by Her Majesty The Queen to her room. What on earth does she want to do? Aah, it’s Princess-sama! Are there any orders?”

After that, Siesta went to Saito’s front, and clung onto him hard. The unconscious Saito reclined onto Siesta.

“Aah! Knight-sama! I have always been yearning for you!”

“Princess-sama! No you can’t! I have already decided, it’s Siesta!”

“It’s all right! After all, isn’t she just a maid!”

Siesta pushed Saito down onto the bed.

“Because I’m the queen! Because my breasts are the queen’s! Because my breasts are the queen’s! Such breasts! Oh my!”

Saying that, Siesta forced the unconscious Saito’s hand to her breasts. *Poon!* Louise knocked Siesta’s head.

“It hurts!”

“You went too far. And I can’t remember ever seeing such cheap drama.”

Rummaging around her things, Siesta took a book out of the space between her things.

“What is this?”

“A book which is very fashionable in Tristania right now.”

“You can read?”

Louise said in an astonished voice. Commoners who could read and write were scarce.

“Before serving in the academy, I learned reading in a temple.”

Louise stared hard at the title of the book.

“Whhhattt? *Countess Butterfly’s graceful day*?”

Louise flipped through the pages of the book, and her face turned crimson red suddenly.

“Wh-! What is this!? Why is it so indecent?”

As if it was filthy, she dropped the book onto the bed quickly.

“Not interested?”

“Why would I be!? If I read such book, my RETRIBUTION would be decided! Founder Brimir would not forgive me!”

Mysteriously, Siesta whispered in Louise’s ears.

“The second chapter is great.”

“I didn't hear that! I didn't hear that!”

While she was saying that, Louise stole glances at the book which she threw away some time ago.

“*"In any way you wish, attend to me."* Saying that, Madam Butterfly let the knight attend to her! That is...! Yikes, yikes! Don't say it! Eek, eek, eek!”

Blushing deeply, *pong pong*, Siesta hit Louise at her shoulder. After that, she snatched the book away, and started again.

In front of Louise's eyes, Siesta flipped a few pages of the book. Louise's face which was crimson red, colored all the more every time a page was turned over, as if she was boiling.

“I, think so.”

“Ah! Agagagagagaga.”

Whilst trembling, Louise could not enunciate her words properly. The content inside the book was way beyond the height of even the clouds of Louise's poor knowledge. Although she could not even understand a tenth of incidents which occurred in the book, in any case, the dreadful contents plunged into Louise's head.

“The queen surely has done the things written in this book, with Saito. Definitely. For the nobles, speaking of which, they are surely sexually perverse, I think. That... don't the nobles pay close attention to their conducts? As a result, the cravings which they could not speak out, accumulate, and *bang*”

“That's not true!”

“Bang.”

“Princess-sama wouldn't do such things!”

Louise snatched the book away, and threw it onto the bed.

“Wah! She would even do it for 55 sous!”

“Su-Such things! Such filthy things! Although it's him, he would not do such a thing to Princess-sama! Even if it was a command, but...”

“To a knight, a command is absolute! Can you deny it? Even if Saito doesn't want to do it, if he were commanded by Her Majesty The Queen, he could not disobey at all! Can he say anything at all? The worst thing is the court services...”

“B-But... This fellow here is deeply in love with me! He says it all the time! I like you! Ha! He won't do it that easily even if it was a command, will he? He won't...”

Siesta gazed icily at Louise who put on airs and combed her hair backwards.

“Saito-san always says 'I like you' to Louise, but...”

“What? Make yourself clear.”

“I don't want to make you angry.”

“I won't get angry. Say it.”

“That 'like' he said...”

“Yeah?”

“What if... it is only because he is your familiar?”

Overcome with surprise, Louise stared at Siesta. It was just like a topic from somewhere she had not anticipated.

“Although I don't understand the relationship between mages and their familiars very well, but... familiars are things to protect the mage right? Everyone's familiar... Guiche-sama's mole, Miss Zerbst's fire salamander... don't they like their masters very much? But, if they were not familiars, they would not be so attached to their masters, right?”

“But! But but! Even when Saito's runes disappeared and he wasn't a familiar, he chose to be my familiar again! If he doesn't like me, why did he do that?”

“There is a possibility that it is his sense of responsibility.”

Calmly analyzing, Siesta told Louise.

“Sense of responsibility?”

“Yeah. As far as I can tell, Saito-san is a strong, responsible person. That's why he strove hard to be the rear guard when the allies were being pursued by the army of seventy thousand; that's why he carried the responsibility of being the Assistant Commanding Officer of the Knight Corps. Isn't that true? Becoming Miss Vallière's familiar, to help you.... Because he felt that he had not accomplished his task yet, he chose the fate of becoming Miss Vallière's familiar once again...”

Feebly, Louise collapsed to her knees. Panicking, Siesta caught hold of her shoulder.

“D-Don't be so depressed, please! In the end it's just a possibility! Just a possibility! Although it may exist...”

Siesta's words could no longer reach Louise. *What if that's the case?* This premonition of hers started expanding rapidly. Of course, it might have been what Siesta had said.

The favor Saito held towards her... it could just be a deceiving feeling because of his contract as a familiar.

Inside Louise's heart, an unrecognizable dark cloud started expanding.

What should I do? Louise murmured.

During that night...

Together with Guiche and the rest, Saito was drinking at the Ondine Knight Corps of the Water Spirit's gathering spot.

This “gathering spot” referred to a shed set up beside Teacher Colbert's laboratory, which was used to park the Zero Fighter. A table was placed in the empty space in the shed, along with some old unused chairs around the table ..... Voila! A small drinking pub was created. After dinner, Saito and the others gathered here to discuss the affairs of the Knight Corps and boring stuffs, getting excited by foolish chats. Obviously, the priority lay at the foolish chats.

Towards Saito who was pouring wine with a drunk face, Guiche asked,

“It is almost nine o'clock, but we can drink here until any time we want, right?”

“Yup. It's all right!”

In a disappointed voice, Saito replied.

With a face of disbelief from the bottom of his heart, Malicorne who was sitting beside commented.

“Louise and that personal maid of yours are waiting for your return right? And yet you don't want to return. Why's that so?”

"Uwaaaaaaa!" Hugging his head, Saito shivered. Malicorne seemed to fly into rage at such a response. He began to grumble nonsense into Saito's ears as Saito laid face down on the table.

“Oh ya, Louise has such an attitude, and her figure looks like a child, and she's not that popular. But no matter what, she's still an outrageous beauty, isn't she? That maid with a disgusting figure adores you right? Of course, if one can pay, he can employ many maids, but to have one which devotes even her heart cannot be found that often. How envious!”

“Id-Idiot! That's not something good!”

Empathetically lifting his face, Saito declared to Malicorne. Malicorne's face stiffened, and he drained his cup jerkily. His eyes began to become glassy.

“... “*That's not something good!*”? Are you despising me? You parvenu.”

“Pa-Parvenu!?”

“Don't have anything to say? Parvenu. Stopping the seventy thousand, becoming a noble...♪ huh? Hehehe what's the problem I'm a chevalier ♪? On top of that ♪ huh?”

“Th-This... fatso... Are you looking for a fight!”

Saito said that, a fiendish smile surfaced on Malicorne's face, who was intoxicated by wine.

“Interesting. Shall we do it? You boring parvenu, what do you want to do with I, this noble?”

“Y-Yo-Youu... You bas- you bastard...”

Saito said strongly, and someone said “Stop!”. Saito stuck his chest out as well. However, without any hesitation at all, Malicorne leaped towards Chevalier Saito.

“Wh-!?”

“I'm gonna teach you something scarier than the 70,000 troops. Get it? Since we were born, these seventeen years... spring, summer, autumn, winter; morning, noon, night...”

After shaking uncontrollably, Malicorne yelled as hard as he could at Saito.

“You're not welcomed!!!”

“...Eh?”

“Do you understand this pain of not being welcome? The fear from which even the 70,000 troops would flee! Aah, a dragon? An elf? Bring them along!! All these things are just some amateur's BULLSHIT!! I'm not scared at all!! But in front of the fact called 'not welcomed'...”

Without thinking, Saito retreated from the spirit of Malicorne's yell. It was a yell whose spirit had a force stronger than the 70,000 Albion army. As if spreading the atmosphere of an invincible evil spirit, the fat Malicorne drew closer to Saito.

“Being able to woo two girls, what the hell!? Oi! Commoner!”

“Errrr, umm...”

Being completely overwhelmed, Saito started fumbling around.

“Bastard! What did you say just now? I'm asking you! I'm a noble! Just like how a commoner who got promoted would speak, I'm asking you!!”

“Th-That's not something that good...”

“Can't hear you!”

“That's not something- good. Yeah.”

Malicorne shook his head.

“You f*cker, are you insulting me? You're insulting ME!? In the 17 years since I was born, I have never received even a single line of poetry from any girl, or

should I say, with matching looks, girls laughing at me... Laughing at someone who has been given such a life!? Oi! Tell me! How does this happiness-thingy taste like!? Tell this Malicorne de Grandple!”

Unable to just look, Guiche placed his arm on Malicorne's shoulder.

“Malicorne. Looks like you've drunk too much... Ugh!”

Malicorne's fist sunk into that face. Guiche tumbled down unsteadily. Apparently, Malicorne had gone crazy from intoxication. A troubled fatso.

“This fellow who has a lover; don't lecture this Malicorne! I'll let you taste a faster-than-wind fist...!”

At that bloodcurling aura, Saito trembled.

“Listen! Those who have a lover, take a step forward! Don't you dare to even breathe! You bastards, you don't even have a right to breathe in front of me!”

Although it was an unreasonable reasoning, at that force, no one could speak even a word. Students of unknown nationalities bowed their heads at Malicorne.

“So-Sorry... Although we still don't get it, but sorry.”

Malicorne's lips curved into a “he” () character, and started trembling gradually.

“...If you're sorry, give them to me!”

“Eh?”

“Your girls, give them to me!”

Although he told us that... Saito and the rest exchanged glances.

“Isn't it good letting them to me? Even I am a good guy as well, so give'em to me! No, because I am a good guy, give them to me! You guys who cannot not be like me, hand the girls out!”

“If you're not a human being...” The instant somebody said that, Malicorne unleashed his magic upon him. The guy was flashily blown away by a Wind

magic with a brute force unlike a “Dot” magic.

“Hey. I am not a human... in what way?”

“...A c-cat, or a lizard. Anyway, we would persist on finding whether you are MALE or FEMALE...”

For the second time, Malicorne's Wind magic blew the one who said that in a soft voice away.

“That's enough... that's already enough. You idiots have made me completely furious!”

At the moment Malicorne was shaking all over from anger, *Pang!!*, the door of the hangar opened.

With Louise and Montmorency who were folding their arms as their lead, it was the group of female students. They began to voice their complaints to Saito, Guiche, and their own lovers.

“Until when are you going to drink!? Isn't the curfew 8 o'clock!?”

Saying that, Louise pinched Saito's ear.

“Guiche, today you're not going to recite any poems to me?”

Saying that, with her toes, Montmorency nudged Guiche who was lying on the bed.

“Have you forgotten? Didn't you promise tonight??” The other girls started making an uproar.

Due to the flirting scene unfolding before his eyes, Malicorne could not endure it any longer, and screamed,

“GIVE THE GIRLS TO ME TOO!!!!!!”

The next moment, *bang!* Coming out from the ceiling of the hangar which was made up of only wood, something landed on top of Malicorne.

Malicorne was pinned down heavily, “Ugh...” and let out a dying moan, and lay

on the bod, motionless.

At that unbelievable turn of events, the students around him bulged their eyes.

The one who had landed was somehow... a long, blue-haired, pretty girl. 20 something years old? The knight apprentices opened their eyes wide in fixation.

That girl was stark naked. The snow-white skin was exposed completely. After restlessly surveying her surrounding with a blank face, she tried standing up whilst tottering unsteadily... but fell down clumsily.

“Kyui...”

Just like a fawn which was just being born, the blue-haired girl managed to stand up with great difficulty. However, she did not try to conceal her bare skin at all. The female students quickly closed the eyes of their respective lovers. Louise was the only one who kicked Saito around.

“Ouch! Kyui kyui!” She cried out.

Apparently, Saito was the girl's objective, as she leaped onto him gently.

“Wh-What!?”

In a panicked voice, Saito shouted. Being embraced by a naked girl suddenly, Saito was utterly shocked.

“We finally met. Yay~~~! Kyui kyui!!”

Whilst making “Kyui kyui” sounds, the blue-haired girl hugged Saito tightly and jumped around excitedly. Louise's face turned white, and subsequently red; her eyebrows lifted sky-high, and the hair on her head stood.

“So this is really a dog or should I say beast or should I say unbelievably finding one after another from anywhere!? Grrrr... SHAMELESS~~~! Anyway, you go to hell!”

Anyhow, whilst shouting angrily, from behind, her right foot struck Saito between his legs, and started dancing exuberantly on top of Saito who had fallen down.

At her actions, the blue-haired girl pushed Louise away.

“What are you doing!?”

“This is bad! This is bad! This is bad!”

After the series of commotion, Saito who was completely awake from his intoxication, spoke.

“What on earth is bad? Or should I say, who are you? Before this, put on your clothes!”

“Anyway, just put this on meanwhile,” Montmorency handed her the shawl she was wearing.

“Please save my sister!”

"Please save my sister! Kyui kyui!" The blue-haired girl cried out many times.

“Who on earth are you?”

As if she was troubled, the blue-haired girl inclined her head.

“Erm... that... Irukukuu. I'm my onee-sama's younger sister. Ah, onee-sama is a person over here called Tabitha.”

“Tabitha's younger sister?”

Everyone present bulged their eyes at the blue-haired girl's statement.

“Younger sister... you don't look like her.”

As Saito folded his arms and said thus, Irukukuu cried out, “Kyui kyui!”

With great difficulty, Irukukuu started explaining with words.

The consequence of Tabitha's betrayal, which were the deprivation of Tabitha's position as a Chevalier by the Gallian government, and also the edict to seize her mother.

To rescue her mother, Tabitha faced Gallia on her own.

However, at that place, she was captured by an elf who boasted of an overwhelming magic.

“Hey, so you want us to rescue her?”

Saito said that, and “Kyui!” Irukukuu nodded.

With a suspicious look, Guiche stared at Irukukuu.

“...This girl, is she one of the subordinates of Gallia which had attacked you and Louise?”

Guiche who had heard about the attack on Louise, started displaying a doubtful look.

“Tabitha was imprisoned, and we have to save her, you said, but that sounds somewhat suspicious. Or could this be a TRAP?”

Montmorency threw a skeptical look at Irukukuu as well. Irukukuu looked deeply troubled, "Kyui!"... and was disheartened.

“This is suspicious! You! No matter how I look at you, you don't appear to be her sister one bit!”

“I don't believe as well.”

“As I thought, you are Gallia's bait, huh?”

Guiche said that, because of which, in a anger-filled voice,

“Since you can't be of any help, don't talk nonsense."

“Wh-What was that!?”

“I'll show you the proof! Kyui!”

Irukukuu sped out of the shed. They followed after her, and a familiar giant appeared in the darkness.

“Sylphid!”

Sure enough, it was Tabitha's familiar, Sylphid.

“Was your master captured!?”

Saito asked, and Sylphid nodded profusely.

“Wait! We will go save her immediately!”

In sheer delight, Sylphid purred “Kyui kyui!” and rubbed Saito's head with her head. Evidently, that was the expression of her joy.

“If this wind dragon says so, we have no choice but to believe.”

“She's the familiar after all, right?”

Guiche and Montmorency exchanged looks, and nodded.

Whilst shaking his head, Malicorne muttered.

“By the way, what happened to the girl just now?”

For some reason, Sylphid turned her head away awkwardly. Suddenly, she flapped her wings, flew up towards the night sky, and disappeared.

“What's with that guy?”

A short while later, the blue-haired lady from some time ago dashed out from the darkness.

“Where'd you go!?”

Saito asked, and,

“T-Toilet.”

“How should I say it... You are Tabitha's younger sister, and yet why are you bigger than your elder sister? And besides, you were not wearing any clothes. That's not normal at all.”

“Because I am a younger sister with a s-sense of duty. Clothes... that, Slyphid! When I jumped off from her, they slipped off.”

She was in a profuse cold sweat. At that expression, Saito understood this lady. Tabitha's dutiful younger sister...

"I think she has some mental disability, so it would be too much to doubt her."

Saito placed his hand on Louise's shoulder, and said this with a straight face.

“Eh? Re-Really?”

Irukukuu became nervous and at a loss of what to do, and without warning, she opened her arms, hugged his head and turned round and round.

“Kyui kyui.”

Actions and speech of unclear meanings.

“...I see.”

Her actions made Louise accept Saito's explanation. Within the royal families, there were quite a number of 'these people'. Anyway, Irukukuu looked too naive for a trap. There would not be any sinister motives behind the information she gave them.

“Incidentally, where did Sylphid go?”

“Th-That! That child got injured. To heal her wound, she left for a while.”

“You were injured as well, weren't you?”

Montmorency noticed the injury on Irukukuu's leg. She cast Water spell at it, but it still did not heal.

“It is quite a serious wound huh?”

Nevertheless, Irukukuu shook her head.

“This is nothing much! It will get well very soon, so I'm fine!”

Montmorency inclined her head. Thinking that perhaps it was because of her weak magic ability, she could not help but bite her lips.

In order to work over the strategy after this, they returned to the cabin. Montmorency followed behind as well.

Malicorne addressed Irukukuu who displayed a relieved-looking face.

“Hey. Tabitha's younger sister, huh.”

“Kyui?”

“Just now, when I shouted “I wanted a good girl as well!!” you then dropped down.”

“Kyui.”

“You could be a fairy bestowed by the heavens to me.”

Blushing, Malicorne stretched out his hand. However, Irukukuu ignored the hand easily, and rushed into the cabin.

Malicorne who was left behind, "Fuoooo~~~!!" screamed, and looked up to the sky.

The stars could not be seen.

Chapter 4: The Queen and the Knights

“Why did you go alone...”

After hearing her complete explanation, Saito sighed in exasperation.

With the news Irukukuu brought, a serious atmosphere started hanging in the air.

Guiche and the other knights knitted their eyebrows, and were thinking about it.

Regrettable, Saito thought. Because Tabitha went there alone. She probably did not want to impose further inconvenience unto Saito and the others.

While thinking that, Saito became embarrassed.

When he was stopped by Henrietta, he felt relieved for a moment, it was unforgivable.

I had thought about doing what I could in this world, and yet when it came to times like these, I who hesitated, cannot be forgiven.

Maybe that could not be helped.

At any rate, Gallia is a large kingdom... the people who defeated the powerful Albion forces with one blow.

Until yesterday, I did not know how to fight enemies of such power.

I definitely cannot win by just swinging my sword around recklessly. Because I was stopped by Henrietta, I did not have to make an enemy of those people I had no idea how to fight against. That's why I was relieved.

But, if I do not know the way, can't I just think about it?

Surely there's some way.

Now, I have finally determined. A determination to think about it, and to take action.

My relieved self is unforgivable. Instead of thinking about the best way, the part of my heart which gave up, saying that it is no use, is unforgivable.

He felt that the thing which had been bugging him until now, had flown somewhere else. Cheerfully, Saito said to Irukukuu,

“It's great that you informed us. Chill, we will surely save Tabitha. Right, guys?!”

Saito said that, and half of those present nodded.

“Of course! As a knight, we cannot let this pass!”

“No matter what happened, taking a girl into captivity is unforgivable! I'll do it! I wi-!”

Clenching his fist tightly, Malicorne shouted. He reacted when it came to girls.

However, having brought forth such a brave idea, there was hesitation as well.

“But... if we were to think rationally, those guys are still impossible.”

The one who said that was Reynal who shouldered the responsibility of managing the external business of the OndineKnight Corps of the Water Spirit. While everyone was fooling around, he was sitting in a corner, quietly sipping his alcohol but... now that trouble had turned up, he stepped forward as if it was his turn.

“What's your problem? You scared?”

Saito drew closer, and Reynal said calmly.

“I am not afraid. Just that, we are already the queen's knights right? We cannot do as we like, isn't that so?”

“Yeah, that's true,” a male student agreed.

The Ondine students' opinions were split directly in half. “If we don't go and

save our classmate, what kind of knights are we?” This group which was with Saito.

“We're up against another country, we can't just poke our head into this just on a whim.” The other group which was with Reynal.

A noisy quarrel ensued, after which they turned to the corps leader in unison.

“Hey Guiche. You are the commanding officer right? Decide!”

Caught in between the two factions in such a way, Guiche became flustered.

“I-I decide?”

“Isn't that obvious?”

“A-Ah I see... whatever it is, this, that! The opinions are quite good. The girl, or the duty of the knight corps...”

“Don't 'quite good' about, decide now!”

Irritated, Montmorency urged Guiche. "Gulp", Guiche swallowed his saliva. After that, he hugged his head again, and started agonizing.

“Geez! You...” whilst Montmorency was saying that...

Louise shouted in quite a mad voice,

“What are you all doing right now!? If that's it, only those who want to go should go. Isn't that good enough!? We don't need every member to go right!? Those who want to go and help, let's go!”

Taken aback, everyone present stared at Louise.

“About that... but we are still the knight corps...”

When Saito said that in a sullen voice, Louise kicked him between the legs.

Guuu...Placing her foot on the head of Saito who had fallen down, in a pose which seemed to have become her routine, Louise shouted.

“If you all can't agree on a opinion, what kind of knights are you! Or rather, if you really want to go to save her, you would have rushed out by now, wouldn't you? You won't be talking meaninglessly here right!?”

At her words, from under Louise's foot, Saito sighed.

“Y-Yeah...”

Obsessed in the knight corps, looks like I had forgotten the fundamental thing. If it was himself from just not long ago, wouldn't he just rush out to save her in spite of anything?

I had become prudent, this sounds better, but... maybe there is this part of me as well which doesn't want to part with the title I was bestowed?

Being stopped by Henrietta, because of my relief, I had become embarrassed. Geez, fretting over the title I have over here, what should I do...

Saito stood up, and nodded.

“Allll right! Those who want to save Tabitha, follow me!”

Ooohh! Cheers went out.

Nevertheless, Louise frowned all the more.

“Wait right there. We can't go WITHOUT a proper plan!”

“Plan?”

“That's right. To properly inform the princess, to ask for help or cooperation, and then to embark on the journey to Gallia. We're not going against some band of thieves or some monster over there. Our opponent is the Kingdom of Gallia!”

Dazzled, Saito looked up to Louise who declared that with her arms akimbo.

Under her, Louise saw Saito looking up at her, captivated, and thought.

Tabitha.

The petite, blue-haired girl...

That honest child, although I don't know what she has been thinking, but hasn't she been helping us all the time? That's why I will go. I must go.

If it were during those days, I probably wouldn't have thought like that.

At that instant, she was astonished at herself who thought that way.

Tabitha and myself, I had no idea that our relationship would go to such an extent.

But... Tabitha has always helped us, without any reason whatsoever.

Just like this fellow... Louise stared at Saito who was under her feet.

Saito as well, helping me without any reason.

That's why, for Tabitha who had always helped us without any reason, I will go and save her as well.

Yeah, I am probably changing.

Until yesterday, I had been blindly accepting Henrietta and my country; I had been thinking about the honor of a noble. However, truthfully, that's not the case. At that time, I started to realize. That was probably why I could strike Henrietta the other day.

In exchange for Henrietta and my motherland, I still do not really know what I should believe in but... my heart is telling me to take action, I think. Louise could sense that it was right.

Gumm, Louise glared at Saito.

Although it's me, when I have to do it, I'll do it.

I have tried to be a hero and self-important by myself! Idiot! Idiot idiot!

“Alright! Let's go to the palace now!” Gazing at Saito who had stood up, Louise thought.

Saito who had always helped her in that way, his feelings...

What if it is as Siesta has said, his feelings for me are as a familiar?

As if denying the indescribable anxiety, Louise shook her head, and went after Saito.

The Ondine members and Louise walked until they reached the *Ostland* which was anchored outside the academy. Running up the ramp, she pointed at the captain's cabin.

Donk donk! She knocked the door, and Colbert creeped out with a sleepy face.

“Wh-t? Anything?”

From the room beside, with the habitual habit of yawning, Kirche stepped out as well.

“Whatttt... so late at night...”

“Please go to the palace now!”

“What on earth... what's wrong?”

“Tabitha was captured by the Kingdom of Gallia!”

Saito said that, and Kirche's eyebrows shot up.

“What the hell!?”

Colbert frowned as well.

“Is this true?”

“Yeah. We were told by Sylphid and Tabitha's dutiful sister.”

“So, we're going to Gallia now?”

In a calm voice, Kirche asked.

“No... before that, we go to princess-sama's place to seek for help, authorization and cooperation.”

After staring motionlessly at Saito, as if consenting, Kirche nodded.

“So, we'll depart now! Miss Zerbst, I'll leave the steam engine to you.”

“Ya-!”

Kirche nodded, and vanished to start up the fire in the steam engine. Colbert rang the bell which was installed in the captain's cabin, and over the whole ship, bell rings reverberated. The crew the Zerbst family employed, flew out from every corner of the ship.

“Everyone! We're departing now! Drop the rope!”

The rope which was used to fix the ship onto the ground, was quickly cut off, and the *Ostland* rose.

Although the *Ostland*'s instantaneous highest speed was far inferior to that of dragons, on average it displayed a cruising speed which could be compared to dragons. Roughly three times faster than sailing ships. In just less than an hour, they arrived in the skies of Tristainia.

Leaving the ship in the sky, Saito and the others landed in the courtyard of the palace with “Levitation”. The guards on duty as usual were the Manticore Corps.

The Commanding Officer who had a good look with his bushy eyebrows, shouted in surprise when he saw the human figures.

“I thought it was someone suspicious, but it is you all huh... This time, what is it?”

“De Cesaire-dono. We wish to be admitted into Her Majesty's presence.”

Louise said that, and the Commanding Officer of the Manticore Corps frowned.

“An unreasonable request so late at night, if you were ordinary people I would have refused you directly but... if it is you all, I guess that can't be helped.”

Having heard what Saito and the others said, Henrietta became silent for a while.

After that, she lifted her face...

“I cannot permit all of you to go directly.”

Thinking that they would acquire the help of being issued with the passage permission document to Gallia, and above that, being granted escorts to the country border, the group was splashed with cold water.

“I will summon the ambassador and conduct a full inquiry into this incident. Together with the incident of Louise's attack, I will strongly protest it.”

“No way. Well then, what should we do? You would order us to watch quietly?”

Henrietta became troubled. After that, she gazed at Saito,

“Once you get there, what would happen next?”

“But! But!”

“Isn't this the first time Tabitha-dono became part of the conspirators who attacked you and Louise? Why do all of you go to such lengths so save such a person?”

“If she did not betray them halfway, we could not have saved Louise. She is our... lifesaver. Isn't Louise's lifesaver the country's lifesaver as well?”

Pleading desperately, Saito drew near to Henrietta.

“Well then, though unwilling, I would declare Tabitha as our lifesaver. However, Tabitha-dono is Gallia's Chevalier. At best, whatever was done to her, isn't it Gallia's right? If we meddle in this, wouldn't it become an interference in their domestic affairs?”

“The ones going are us. It is not Tristain's secret messengers or army.”

“All of you are now my household troops. Whatever your intentions may be, you would be perceived as “the actions of the Kingdom of Tristain”. If you go over there and save someone who committed a crime, it would cause serious opposition from them.”

At the gravity of the situation, Saito and the rest were at loss of words.

“It would probably turn into a war. All of you are going despite that?”

They were clearly told that... and sighs could be heard from the students of the Ondine who gathered.

“What Your Majesty said is true.”

“It would be terrible if a war occurred.”

With Reynal as their head, they started dissuading Saito together.

“Understood,” Saito replied.

“You guys go back to the academy first.”

“Saito. We have said many times, it is not because we're afraid...”

Reynal directed his eyes at Saito, in persuasion.

“I know. I don't think of you guys as cowards. I know what Her Majesty said is quite right, and I understand what you feel. Just that, I have a bit more to say.”

A relieved atmosphere flowed through that place. Everyone of the Ondine retreated to Her Majesty's office. The ones left behind were only Guiche, Malicorne, Saito and Louise.

“Can you please give this up?”

As if appealing, being gazed at by Henrietta's eyes, his feelings wavered at once.

When their eyes met in such a manner... it was not the grim and stern queen's expression, but the defenseless one, just like when they exchanged kisses previously.

Not as a queen... but as someone intimate, wanting him not to go.

That was what her expression told Saito.

Staring at Henrietta's countenance, Saito's determination started swaying.

But still... as he thought, he could not accept it. Although he was appealed to by her feelings, he could not desert the person who saved him.

He could not consent to it.

Slowly, Saito removed the mantle he was wearing.

“Wh-What are you doing?”

Guiche said in a panicked voice.

Respecfully, Saito handed the mantle over to Henrietta.

“...Wh-”

With a shocked look, Henrietta stared at Saito.

“I am returning it. Although it had been a short time... thanks for all your help.”

“Y-You...”

Henrietta trembled all over.

“With this, there won't be any trouble for Tristain. Isn't that so?”

Henrietta trembled for a moment, and in a small, tearful voice:

“Idiot...” she muttered.

The young queen rang the pre-installed bell.

“Is there anything?” Quietly, the Manticore corps of the bodyguard group rushed in.

“Disarm these people of their weapons, and arrest them.”

Looking at Henrietta who had pointed at Saito and said thus, Guiche's expression turned pale. Louise paled as well.

“Princess!”

“Err, but... but...” The Commanding Officer of the Manticore corps shook his head. That's because he could not digest the current situation properly.

“Quickly.”

Being urged by Her Majesty The Queen, he straightened his collar and turned around at Saito.

“It is because of the command. Don't hold any grudge against me.”

Saying that, he confiscated Saito's sword, and tied his hands behind him. *What should we do?,* Guiche and Malicorne exchanged glances, but since Saito had obediently let himself be arrested, they followed him helplessly. The other corps members confiscated their wands, and tied them up as well.

“For a while... please cool down your head.”

Henrietta informed them in a sorrowful face... and the magic guard corps dragged Saito and the others away.

After that, Louise was left with Henrietta. Now becoming just the two of them, Henrietta laid her body down onto her chair.

“Why! Why couldn't they understand! Wishing to put their lives in danger! What would happen if they went to Gallia! To locate an arrested knight in such a big country, isn't that just like locating a pebble which was dropped into a lake? Besides that, couldn't they understand that they cannot move freely in a foreign country! To make things worse, Gallia is targeting the Void! Louise, your Void! Have you thought about the danger that is awaiting you! What... on earth...”

Gazing at the distraught queen, Louise could guess something which was fairly close to her feelings. Above the souring of the relationship with Gallia... Because of her woman's instinct, Henrietta probably did not want Saito to go.

Upon seeing such Henrietta... the former Louise would definitely be as frantic as

her.

She would have weighed her own feelings along with that of Henrietta's.....and then fret about if she should fight with her about this to the bitter end, or just give in meekly out of her loyalty? Louise would become distressed.

Nonetheless, the present Louise was strangely calm.

Now is not the time to worry over such a thing.

The thing which I must do... is to help Tabitha.

For that sake, I must do what I must.

That is the duty of I, who was born a noble. Louise thought.

Louise gently placed her hand onto Henrietta's shoulder.

“What Princess said is quite right. For an Academy of Magic student, if she were to be weighed against a foreign country's chances, the latter would win.”

“That's right, Louise. I did not make a mistake. Yeah, for the time being, I want them to think over it calmly in the palace.”

“Just that... It is beyond me to agree to everything which is correct.”

“...Eh?”

Henrietta moved the hand which was concealing her face, and lifted her face.

“As for us, there is this reason that we must stick to.”

“What's the matter? What are you talking about?”

Dumbfounded, Henrietta stared at Louise.

“For me, until now, I would have always believed that serving your Majesty would be my principle of action. However .....during these recent times, there's a voice deep in my heart telling me that ..... blindly accepting your Majesty's orders is not the real path I should take.”

“Louise...”

With a troubled look, Henrietta gazed at Louise.

“This time, I have already resolved to go to save Chevalier Tabitha-dono. I believe that is the reason I must stick to. At the same time, I am aware that I am probably opposing Princess. Princess-sama has her own position. The position as a queen...”

“Even you, what are you saying?”

“While I know that... I have come to report to Princess. Why? Whilst knowing I would be opposed, why did I come to inform your Majesty? That is because I have felt sort of like the same “reason” I must stick to as well. I will stick to the "principle" I believe.....Even though all this time I have lost my direction, but now I believe that my pride as a noble should be placed on this path..”

Both the ladies which shared the special, childhood days together, were now confronting each other as a queen and a noble.

“Louise, have you forgotten? You are my court lady! You mean you are going to disobey my intentions?”

Silently, Louise removed her mantle, and presented it onto Henrietta.

“...Louise. Louise! Do you know what you're doing now!? Taking down your mantle would mean...”

“Yeah. With this, I am no longer a noble of Tristain. I am just Louise. Your Majesty, please treat me as part of the rebels who want to go to Gallia. After our departure, please proclaim this to the whole of Halkeginia. 'Inform the neighbouring country governments. Rebels are at large, there is a possibility for them to cross the country frontier. Upon discovery, please punish them according to your country's laws.' If your majesty does that, Tristain would not have any troubles.”

Henrietta trembled for a while... then, shaking her head, she called out to the remaining guards.

Facing the imperial guards who bowed down humbly, Henrietta told them.

“Arrest this person. Until I say otherwise, do not let her out of the palace.”

“Ha, ha...!”

The guards obeyed respectfully, and bowed once at Louise.

“Please hand over your wand.”

Staring at Louise, Henrietta said.

“The things you said are not wrong. I think they were splendid.”

A short pause.

After a quick bow, Louise surrendered her wand to the imperial guards.

At the back of Louise who was brought out from the room, Henrietta said in a sad voice.

“I don't have the self-confidence, I do not think that I can carry it out properly. But, I am still the queen, Louise.”

Saito and the others were all confined within a room in a tower at the west side of the palace.

In the ten tatami mat wide room, beds and desks were prepared. Probably this was a room built for the use of nobles. Yet, even though it was for the use of nobles, it was as if the fact that it was used as a prison did not change.

The windows and doors were barred with thick metal grills. On the other side of the thick doors, two sentinels carrying huge halberds were standing there.

Sitting on the beds, Guiche and Malicorne were looking out from the window, rather miserably. Light from the twin moons which shone in, cast a shadow of the metal bars. Seeing that, Guiche murmured in a miserable voice.

“Haaa... damn. If my father and elder brother knew about my current condition, they would probably feel so sad... And they had felt so happy when I became a commanding officer of the Imperial Guards... They had even called me the pride of the Gramont family...”

Malicorne sighed deeply as well.

“How could Her Majesty become so angry...”

Saito felt sorry for the both of them, who had no fault in this matter at all. Reflexively, he bowed his head quickly.

“Sorry. Because you all have accompanied me...”

Well, isn't that fine? Whilst shaking his hand flutteringly, Guiche said to Saito.

“Don't worry about it. Not being able to coordinate the knight corps, I am at fault as well. Oh well, because I'm the commanding officer, siding with the Assistant Commanding Officer is probably my duty as well.”

“As I thought, going to save the girl who was abducted by a foreign country, hunting down the foxes in their territory, going on a conquest against robber bands; these things are wrong. We had made someone angry.”

With a face which had become completely sober, Malicorne muttered.

“But, why did you all stick along with me? It would have been better if you all went back together with the others.”

“That's because this is more fun!”

Guiche answered readily.

“So is being imprisoned like this the same as well?”

“Yeah. Going along with a girl is fun as well, but... ever since I was born a noble, I have not gotten involved in such heart-thumping adventure! Being imprisoned in the palace! My father and elder brother would surely be sad, but they don't have such an experience!”

"Ahaha", Guiche broke out in laughter. *Ummm, as I thought, this guy is quite a big shot. It's probably right for him to become the corps leader,* Saito thought. *But obviously, the possibility that he is but a complete idiot cannot be put aside as well.*

“I want to become braver,” Malicorne said.

“Braver?”

“Yeah. In times of danger, I want courage. Although I want to try to participate in a war... I could only tremble, become frightened and start crying. I want courage so that I won't escape whatever time it is.”

"I see..."

Saito and Guiche became solemn unintentionally. However, immediately after that,

“If I have such courage, I would probably be more accepted right?”

Malicorne said shyly, because of which the solemn atmosphere dispersed.

“Hey, Saito.”

“What?”

Guiche looked at Saito with a serious expression.

“You should have some plans, don’t you?”

“Plans?”

“Yeah, didn’t you just crazily let yourself be captured without any resistance? Obviously, you would have some plans to escape from here, right?”

With a blank face, Saito answered.

“No.”

Guiche and Malicorne bulged their eyes.

“Ehhh?”

“There is no way for me to have any plan. Derf was confiscated as well. What should I do?”

“You idiooooottttt!! Aaaaahhhhh! Weren’t we arrested…?? Of all the things, adoration and respect to Her Majesty The Queen???”

Hugging his head, Guiche started babbling.

“What’re you talking about!? And yet I had said just now that 'I am glad I can experience such things'!?”

“That and this are different thingsssss!!”

Dejected, Malicorne’s shoulders drooped. Looked like they had become worried suddenly.

“Her Majesty The Queen, would she forgive us, I wonder… Could it be, that we have to be hanged?”

At that, Saito laughed.

“Hey, what are you laughing at?”

The door opened, and Louise showed her face. For some reasons, her mantle was not put on.

“Aren’t you late? We’ve been waiting!”

However, Louise did not reply. With a straight face, she walked in determinedly, and *don!*, sat beside Saito.

“Eh? Louise… didn’t you come to get us ou…”

The guards who escorted Louise inside closed the prison doors again. *Gachang!!* With the sound of the magic lock being locked, Saito, Guiche and Malicorne understood that their fate wasn’t going to change after all.

Chapter 5: Siblings

“Oh boy!! Awesome!! Elves' Ancient Magic!!”

Palace of Versailles, at the Lutèce, Gallia's capital.

The one who stood out completely, within the magnificent palace in the Grand Troyes room made from blue bricks, in front of the guest who came from a foreign country, the Gallian king, Joseph, laughed out loud.

The elf who was the guest, Lord Bidashal, did not reveal the slightest hint of a smile. Today, he had arrested the betrayer Knight of the Northern Parterre, and had brought her here.

His prey, the Knight of the Northern Parterre who was called “Number Seven,” was rolled onto a bed with her hands tied to her back. Being cast a sleeping magic by the elf, she was quietly snoring.

“For you to capture my niece without any trouble at all... that Ancient Magic really exists, huh!”

With his shining golden hair fluttering, Lord Bidashal opened his mouth.

“Your request...which was to capture the traitor - I have already fulfilled it. With this, may I take it as having garnered the privilege to discuss that matter further?”

“Very well. Envoy of the elf king.”

Joseph prompted Lord Bidashal.

“'King' is not the correct way of saying it. We do not have this 'king' title you barbarians use.”

In a quiet voice, the tall elf said.

Although he was called a “barbarian,” Joseph did not feel resentful at all. Gallia was connected to the land the elves inhabited at the east frontier. There were contacts with the elves for a long time already... Those contacts could not be called amicable, but he had already gotten used to the contempt the elves had towards human beings.

“Is it 'Chieftain'? Err, is it 'Chief'? Anyway, you elect your leaders through a voting process, right? What a troublesome thing you are doing...”

“We have already learned the foolishness of deciding the leader through lineage since a long time ago. If you address him as 'king' and not 'chief,' it would be a great insult towards us.”

“Well then, tell me about the intentions of Chief Tariq of the 'Nephthys,' Lord Bidashal.”

With a formal address, he asked that of the elf envoy.”

“The 'Shaitan's Gate' we protect has become quite active lately.”

“Is it something of the Holy Land?”

“To you all it is the Holy Land, but to us it is the abominable 'Shaitan's Gate.' Within these past few decades, its activity had become livelier. We think that the power of the thing known amongst you all as the 'Void'... has caused the revival of Shaitan's Gate.”

“Calling the sacred power 'demon's power', you elves are really arrogant, huh.”

“The power depends on the user, it can become light or darkness. The power which had formerly destroyed our world. You all may think of it as the God's power, but for us, it is the demon's power. A symbol of darkness. Our prophecy is this - *When the four demons gather, the power of the real demon will be awakened. The power of the true demon will probably bring about catastrophe once again.*”

“It is worrisome for them to gather... is that it?”

“That's it. Ever since the great catastrophe six thousand years ago, a few times before this, the demon's powers had showed signs of gathering. Every time that

happened, we were terrified. We wanted to secretly take away this 'Shaitan's Gate' which brought the catastrophe upon us. We wanted to bring it somewhere without any living beings. With that, the safety of the world would be preserved.”

“Hey, what are you trying to tell me? I don't wish for it, but when the time for the gathering comes, they will be gathered. If it is not the time to gather, they won't gather. The powerful strength is called thus.”

“Because here is not our country, we cannot stop the gathering. That would be interference. You are the king who governs the biggest part of Halkeginia World of Barbarians right? When you exercise your influence, we want you to restrain the party which is trying to approach Shaitan's Gate.”

“For you all who use such strong magic, isn't that too trivial? If you are afraid, why not just bash it up? What would happen if you are destroyed by that 'demon' who possessed that power?”

If it turned into that, the first which would be directly trampled upon would be Gallia, but with a negligent attitude, Joseph said that. As if he was wishing for it.

“We do not like disputes. We also know that the thing we regard as 'darkness' is light to you all. If we can exist together, we would have no need to do so.”

Cheerfully, Joseph snorted. Lord Bidashal frowned slightly.

“Are you one of the religious fanatics who believed in Shaitan's Gate as well?”

At the elf who had declared Founder Brimir to be a demon, Joseph laughed out loud.

“I don't believe in God or the Founder. I only believe in myself.”

“I know that. That's why we chose you as the partner for the negotiations. Obviously, we had prepared a suitable exchange.”

“Say it.”

“The hundred year old Sahara at the other side, the rights to mining the Wind Stones, and the provision of various techniques and equipments.”

Wind Stones were something which made a boat fly in the air - an absolute necessity. The crystallization of the previous residents of the wind. There were lots of them sleeping in the Elf-controlled Sahara.

And then, the technology of the elves who had cleared the Sahara desert and changed it into the place where they live; it far exceeded that of humans.

Those two provisions were certainly a really extraordinary proposal.

“How generous.”

“The ideal you all believe in has been distorted. Of course.”

Got it, Joseph nodded his head.

“Very well. There is still one more thing after this.”

“What is it?”

“I want an elf subordinate.”

Lord Bidashal's eyebrows became slightly clouded.

“...I will try to negotiate. I will act accordingly with your wish.”

“There is no need for that. You are good enough. As long as I am alive, serve me!”

Lord Bidashal was speechless.

At the silent elf, Joseph said.

“The pride of serving barbarians is unforgivable? You all want to protect the stability and the harmony of the world right? Haha, doesn't it coincide with my ideal? Serving such a person like me means nothing but protecting the ideals of the elves.”

“I have loyalty towards my mother country as well. My whole existence is...”

At that elf who answered evasively for the first time, Joseph roared.

“IDIOT! You decide on your own!”

Paling, the elf scowled at Joseph... but bowed down eventually.

“...very well. I will serve you.”

“Well then, step back. Go and tell Nephthys that I have understood.”

But, Lord Bidashal did not get up. His stare was fixed on Joseph.

“What? You have something to say?”

“I want you to hear something.”

“Speak.”

“What are you thinking about? You wish for the peace and stability of the world, but looking at your demeanor and your face... I do not think so. Furthermore, the god you people believe in, the god and saint who is probably the foundation of the people you rule over... no matter how much you disbelieve it, we scorn him. Frankly speaking, we imagine this would cause a befitting quarrel. We expected it not to be an easy task. But why do you help us so readily?”

In a bored voice, Joseph replied.

“Because I'm bored.”

“What!?”

“That's enough, leave!”

Joseph became pompous, and waved his hand.

After Lord Bidashal withdrew...Joseph approached Tabitha who was lying senseless on the bed.

Gently holding Tabitha who did not wake up due to the sleeping magic cast on

her by the elf, he then sat down on his throne. Within the sleeping face of the innocent Tabitha, traces of his brother's looks were there.

The one who was gentler and smarter than anyone else, His Highness de Orleans...

As Joseph stroked Tabitha's face, he whispered,

“You were really good at chess, huh. Your moves couldn't be found anywhere else. That's why, Charles, ever since you were gone, my opponent has only been myself. I almost died of boredom and despair. Every day, it was like dancing barefooted on a thorn-layered carpet. Hey, Charles. This time the game is settled. Joining forces with the elvesdemihumans, quashing the ideals and beliefs of human beings. This time, the chess board has surpassed Halkeginia, to the whole world containing Saharathe elves' land and the Holy Land. Although it is “teaming up”, I think about the plans, and I direct them. The elves and the country, all are my chess pieces. How does that sound? I am great right? Charles...”

In Tabitha's sleeping face, Joseph saw his younger brother.

Joseph started reciting towards the sleeping Tabitha.

“Everyone wanted you to become the king. Charles, your magic skills surpassed everyone else. Yeah, you flew at the age of five. At seven, you managed to control fire completely. At eleven, you refined silver. At twelve, you understood the root of Water. I couldn't accomplish any of them, but you accomplished them easily.”

Joseph gently stroked Tabitha's hair.

“I suppose you don't know the feelings I had when I was watching you. Nah, you knew? You kept telling me this. *“Elder brother, you haven't awakened yet. It's probably just because of that.”* Looking at me who was regarded an idiot by the liege and father, you said this as well. *“Elder brother, someday you will be able to do something great as well!”* Worrying about me, losing to me on purpose. However, do you get it now? Every time I was touched by that kindness of yours, it didn't do anything save making me miserable.”

Tears spilled from Joseph's eyes.

“I could not help but be jealous at you. I became jealous at you who had the virtues and talents I had not. But there was no hate. Really. I didn't hate you to the extent of being able to do such a thing. Until that time...”

Joseph closed his eyes.

Upon which... Three years ago, the incident of his father collapsing; was vividly brought back to him.

Father who was on his sickbed, at his final hour, called only both princes to his bedside. Nervous, Joseph and the Duke of Orléans stood at his bedside.

It was the moment to decide the next king.

In a weak, small voice, the king informed both of them.

“...the next king will be Joseph.”

Unbelievable words.

Everyone in the palace thought that Charles, Duke of Orleans, would be appropriate as the next king. Even their mother, the queen, called her eldest son as an imbecile, and supported Charles as the king.

Nevertheless... the king, his father, chose him.

Within Joseph, sheer joy was born. Making him the successive king...his father had probably become dumb due to his sickness. Yet, the words of the king were absolute. He had become king.

The next emotion he had was...a sense of superiority towards Charles. Charles, the one who was said to be the proper king by everyone; how depressed did he feel?

The authority which was supposed to have been his, which had slipped right through his fingers within that instant; how much of despair would he feel? He imagined Charles' bitter face. He was anxious to look at that face...Joseph stole a sidewards glance at his younger brother.

The moment he saw the face...Joseph felt despair instead. He understood that

things were completely different from his vile imaginations.

“Congratulations.”

Smiling sweetly, Charles said that. Joseph could depict everything that happened at that time clearly, word for word.

“It is really great that brother has become the king. That's because I love you very much, brother. I will cooperate with you as hard as possible. Let's make this country a wonderful one together.”

Words without any jealousy, malice or sarcasm. The face of the younger brother who was really happy with his elder brother's crown, was right there. That was the moment Joseph's jealousy towards Charles turned into strong loathing.

With a painful face, Joseph squeezed out some words.

“Why didn't you feel bitter? Why are you gentle to that extent? Why do you have...everything I don't!? Charles, if you want to blame anything, blame your own talent and gentleness. Your cheerful face had killed you.”

During that day...

The one who had shot a poison arrow at the Duke of Orleans when he was out hunting, was Joseph himself.

“...you had said it right. *“Elder brother, you haven't awakened yet. It's probably just because of that.”* I have woken up! It is the “Void”! It's the legend! Just like what you said! Yeah, you have told me this! *“Elder brother, someday you will be able to do something great as well!”* I am doing it! Making the world into a chess board, I am enjoying the game! Everything is just as you said! You're an awesome guy! You were really a great person! Charles!”

After contemplating for a short while...Joseph touched Tabitha who was sleeping, on the lips.

“Your mouth resembles your mum's huh...Charlotte. Even if it were just that, your mother is beautiful. Be grateful to your pretty mother. Your mother who took the Water magic drug drink you were supposed to drink, in your stead...”

As if instructing Tabitha, Joseph continued his words.

“That Water magic drug was prepared by the elves. An ancient, complicated drug. Something which could not be made by human hands, no matter what. Trying that on you, who is my flesh and blood, again makes me hurt... But, it won't change, no matter what. It has to be done. Because you have opposed me, your owner. I have to fasten a leash on you. Don't I? Charlotte.”

When he looked at the person who didn't know anything, whilst smiling very mercifully, at least on the outside; Joseph declared these fiendish words.

“Until that elf finishes preparing the drug, enjoy your remaining time. The last compassion I grant for going against my own blood. Am I not bestowing the royal time I snatched away from you? In the tumbled down castle the elves built, spend a little time as a princess there. Haha, it would be appropriate for you to lose your heart due to the elf's drug. A present from your uncle who never did anything else...”

Holding Tabitha's hands, he pressed them against his forehead.

“Aah! What a sorrowful event! If Charles had not had that smile on his face on that day, right now, you would not be sleeping right now, and you'd be having a dazzling smile on your face! You probably wouldn't suffer from the elf's magic!”

While pressing Tabitha's hands against his forehead, tears flowed from Joseph's eyes. As if he was repenting in front of a priest, Joseph painfully squeezed out his voice.

“Although I have hurt your beloved wife and daughter...it is still incomparable to the pain I felt that day. Even if I use the people in Halkeginia and torment them...it would still be incomparable to my remorse of that day.”

Slowly, Joseph stood up. Deep loathing resided within the eyes from which the tears of regret had vanished.

“That's why, Charles. I can now play with a bigger world in my palms. Using every power and wish, spitting on the virtue and ideals of men. Until the day when my heart hurts more than the time I killed you...I will use the world as a plaything, treating it with scornful contempt.”

Chapter 6: The Imprisoned Six

Saito noticed the sunlight shining through the gap between the metal grills. Beside him, Louise's head rested on his shoulder as she was breathing gently. Guiche and Malicorne laid down side by side on the bed, snoring.

“It's morning, huh...”

In the end, because he was worrying too much, he did not manage to sleep at all.

Funya funya, with her mouth half-opened, Louise was muttering something.

“What... a... pity... the Princess was lonely, after all. Funya...”

What on earth is she dreaming about? Being trapped within these grills, now is not the time to oversleep. We have to leave to save Tabitha quickly...

“Aren't you stupid? Being rejected by the Princess, we can't face our opponents...”

Saito nudged Louise.

“Funya...”

Louise, who was not fully awakened yet, probably could not differentiate between her dream and reality. She saw Saito and yelled angrily at him.

“Treating me as a spare tire for the Princess! You're cruel! Or, whoever you want is fine! That's right! Who is the best?! S-ss-say it!!”

“...What're you talking about?”

Saito asked astonished, and she realized that this place was not a dream, but the real world.

Her face crimsoned, and began hitting Saito repeatedly.

“It's only something I dreamed! A dream!”

“Don't hit me!”

“Even if it was dream, it was still you! So take responsibility!”

Continuing in her state of embarrassment, Louise turned away. Because he couldn't, Saito let out a huge sigh.

“You... you are still in the mood to dream, huh...”

“What?”

“Surely, if you had persuaded the Princess cleverly, we would have been heading towards Gallia to save Tabitha by now...”

“So you mean to say that I am bad?”

“You are the one who said we had to come here to report to the Princess, *weren't you*?”

“Ain't it obvious?”

“We are trying to save someone! If we hadn’t come here to report and instead rushed there straight away, this wouldn’t have happened!”

Upon which, Louise gazed at Saito with a solemn look.

“Saito. That is wrong. Precisely because we are trying to save someone, we must go through the proper procedures.”

“Why!?”

“Say, if we lose. What would we do then? Gallia would think that we are Tristain's spies, right? Because I am the Princess' court lady, and you're an Assistant Commanding Officer of the Imperial Guards. It would be terrible if that were to happen. Gallia would strongly protest against Tristain right? It would probably become the excuse for a war. That's probably their objective.”

“How could this be...”

“What did you want to say? Even though we do not really know if that were the case, since we can not remove this possibility, we should think carefully before making our next move. After all, they are the kingdom of Gallia, which has been using all kinds of cruel methods to attack us. We don't know what they would do. After that, we would probably cause trouble for the Princess, if not all of Tristain. Because of that, it is possible for people unrelated to us to get hurt. Even I want to save Tabitha. But, I cannot cause problems for everyone. That course of action is exactly what someone who had lost their head would take.”

Embarrassed, Saito cast his eyes down.

“Sorry... But I still have to do it! Logically, I know what you said is true, but... because of that, what I can probably do, I naturally can't do it at this rate... Aaaah, damn it! I am really anxious!”

“Yeah, huh... I thought the Princess would probably understand, but... it looks like I was too naïve.”

“We really can't get out of here?”

Absent-mindedly, Saito gazed at the metal grills.

“With your “Void,” is it possible?”

“Impossible. I don't know if 'Dispel' would work, but in the first place, I don't have my wand.”

“You can't use it, huh...”

“If you don't have your sword, you are just an ordinary human, right?”

“I can't use it...”

This time, he said so to himself. However, with a look as if he hadn't thrown away his will yet,

“...Anyway, when we escape from here, I intend to go to Gallia, but don't worry. What you said about bringing trouble to Tristain - it won't happen.”

“What do you mean?”

“Yesterday, didn't I quit being the Assistant Commanding Officer? I'm just a normal person now.”

“You are really naïve, huh...”

Whilst sighing, Louise said.

“What do you mean!?”

“You're thinking that the enemy would believe us? Quitting being a knight alone is not enough! At least until you become a wanted person, then only you can be said to have cut all connections!”

“But can you actually stop being a noble? At least until you are the same as me, your cheekiness...”

At that point, Saito noticed Louise's appearance for the first time. Because she was uneasy, he didn't know, but...

“Your mantle and your tie clip, what happened to them!?”

“I have returned them to Her Majesty The Queen.”

“Returned... you...”

“Shaddap! With this, I'm just the normal Louise! Same as you, a commoner! Com-mon-er! Thank you very much! I have thrown away both my family name and my pride! So don't just show off like that!”

Saito was very touched, more than he had ever been ever since meeting Louise.

This pink-haired female magic user whose pride was supposed to be so high; my master... She had been so obsessive over the “noble” title, and now she had thrown it away easily.

For a girl like Louise, that was probably something which needed a huge amount of courage.

If she hadn’t the determination to throw away the life she had built up until now,

she could not have done such a thing. That's because, as far as Louise was concerned, her status as a noble was her everything.

“Y-You...”

“What-a-waste! You like high-class women very much riggghhhtt? Becoming the familiar of an ordinary girl, you're really disappointed right!”

“N-No way... I... I'm really touched... You would do something as far as that...”

“LIAR! Yesterday night, you stole glances at the Princess and your face turned red! I don't believe you! You like nobles and princesses right! Even though you're a dog! That's so funny!”

As she was yelling that, Louise felt the anxiety Siesta talked about expand within her heart.

What if the “like” he has towards me is but his feeling as a familiar?

What if Saito's real feelings are towards Henrietta... but are stopped by this “like” he has as a familiar?

Then Saito's shaking off Henrietta's request yesterday night can be understood.

The contract I have given him has probably distorted Saito's true feelings...

Anyway, Saito's feelings now are probably towards Henrietta. The thing which is stopping him, are the fake feelings I gave him....

“I don't really fancy nobles or princesses!!”

Saito said disappointedly.

“I dunno such things!”

To shake off the indescribable anxiety, Louise raised her voice.

“Why are you so mad? I have already said it, haven't I? I like...”

“Don't say it!”

Covering her ears, Louise crouched down. Saito withdrew his hand as if it had been stung.

“Okay, okay. I won't say it any more.”

If she didn’t want him to say such things, he couldn't do anything else. Louise became tearful.

Hearing someone clearing his throat, both of them looked forward.

In front of them, Guiche and Malicorne had woken up without them noticing; and weren't they staring motionlessly at the sensitive conversation between Louise and Saito?

Louise's ears became red.

They were seeing everything of the conversation right now.

“N-No! It's not what you think!”

“Err, I don't really mind, but Malicorne...”

Beside Guiche, Malicorne was trembling all over with anger.

“Heeey, Guiche... I'm already at my limiiiiit... Such an envious love game in front of my eyes...?”

Malicorne leaped towards them, and at that instant, Louise pushed Saito forward. Both of them tumbled over and wrestled with each other.

“If it's gonna end like this, you win. Hug me.”

Having given up, Malicorne said that with a faraway look. Saito became sad.

“Hug me!”

“Aaah, haiz.... now is not the time to be doing such things!”

The moment Saito let out a sigh and said that...

From outside the window, a flash of light and a loud noise could be heard.

“...Huh?”

Guiche and Louise leaped up and stretched their heads at the window. Outside, a surprising scenery was unfolding.

With the huge wings gleaming, the *Ostland* was flying at a low altitude, and was scattering something.

“Wh-Why is that thing....”

From the *Ostland*, they could hear a voice magnified by the showy music and magic.

“To all ladies and gentlemen of Tristain. To all ladies and gentlemen of Tristain. This is the debut of the latest steam-run vessel of the Von Zerbst family of Tristain. Everyone walking through the streets, or those in the palace, please come to have a look.”

“Isn't that Montmorency's voice!?”

Sure enough, that was the voice of Montmorency, who was supposed to be waiting for the group's return on the *Ostland*.

In the courtyard of the palace, be it the escorting knights, the soldiers, or the nobles who were walking on the streets, everyone was looking up to the sky.

A few dragon knights approached them, and flew around the *Ostland*. '”Do it somewhere else! Get back!” They were warning them. Yet, without the slightest indication that they were worried, the *Ostland* continued circling it.

The sentinels who were standing outside the prison in which Saito and the rest were locked up were exchanging glances, worried by the spectacle outside.

“Those guys... what do they plan to do?”

“I wonder what they're thinking about...”

As she revealed her feelings, from outside the door, *Donggg!* They heard the sound of the sentinels falling over. Turning back, Saito and the others gulped.

“Kirche!”

Sure enough, the figures which could be seen from between the lattice of the narrow window, were the red-haired dazzling Kirche and...

“Teacher! Teacher Colbert!”

With his bald head gleaming, it was Colbert. Towards the imprisoned four who had rushed to the door, Kirche lifted a finger.

“Shh, quiet.”

Colbert took the bunch of keys from the waist of the defeated sentinels, and inserted them into the keyhole of the door.

Not being able to find the right key, he couldn't make any progress.

At that moment, *clack!* With a sound, the door opened.

“Kirche, teacher!”

The four of them stepped out onto the corridor, and Colbert smiled.

“Exultation and explanation after this. Hurry!”

Because this tower was built to lock nobles up, there was a small room right beside to specially safeguard their personal belongings. Colbert moved as if he was very familiar with the layout of this tower, and located Saito's Derflinger and the others' respective wands inside the small room.

Kirche spread a robe over each of the four who were grasping their wands tightly. Putting that on and following Colbert and Kirche, the group ran down the staircase.

On their way down, every guard was already defeated.

“Did you both do this as well?”

“They're just asleep.”

Kirche replied as if she was having fun. *How on earth did they manage to do*

that? As he was thinking how strange it was, with mage guards as their lead, some soldiers came up from below. It was a group of soldiers who noticed the anomaly in the tower.

“You bastards! What are you doing!?”

As soon as he said that, Colbert who was leading them, reacted. Within a short time, he recited a spell, and held his wand out. A torrent of wind blew away the guard who looked like the leader.

“Wh-!?”

Another guard almost rushed at Colbert's chest, but he delivered a blow into the guard's stomach with his wand. The group of guards who came up could not reach Colbert because of the previous two who were knocked down.

Whilst rushing head-on, Colbert recited another spell. From above the guards who tried to flee, a cloud-shaped green fog broke out. Because of the cloud of slumber, the guards dropped one by one like puppets whose strings were cut.

Saito and the others were shocked at Colbert's deftness. *Could it be that Colbert is so strong...?* As for Louise and Guiche who would have surely thought Colbert as being someone insignificant, they merely stared at that flabbergasting turn of events.

Using his wand itself to hit the enemy, reciting spells so fast as if his lips could not be read, it wasn't the fighting skills of the usual nobles.

“The quality of the guards at the palace had dropped, huh...”

Murmuring that, Colbert broke off into a run again. When they exited into the courtyard, the people there were watching the flying *Ostland* in a daze.

Apparently, it was a rescue mission matching with the *Ostland*.

The security check for the people entering and exiting the palace was loose. Colbert showed them his Academy of Magic identity card, and they easily passed the gate. The group rushed to the castle town.

“T-Teacher, you're awesome...” Saito said, barely managing to calm himself down.

For some reason, a melancholic expression was on his face.

Under Kirche's guidance, the group that sneaked out of the palace headed towards the “Charming Fairies” Inn at which they had worked before. Surprisingly, horses and traveling equipment were already prepared there.

“You're going to save your friends right? I want to help~~~.”

Bending his body forwards, the owner of the “Charming Fairies” Inn, Scarron, smiled at them.

“The preparations are great.... Who on earth informed you that we were caught?”

The moment Saito asked Kirche, from a corner of the bar, a somewhat embarrassed Reynal and the other members of the knight corps who he thought had gone back, came towards him.

“You guys. Didn't you all go back to the Academy?”

Lifting his glasses unconsciously, Reynal responded,

“We thought that you would be refused and would give up after that, and waited secretly for your return at the courtyard. And then, after seeing you all being arrested and taken away...”

“They told us who were waiting on the ship. Then, Jean and I devised a plan, and sought help from this Charming Fairies Inn.”. Said Kirche triumphantly.

Saito was overjoyed. The knight corps did not disperse just like that. They were comrades who would help them in times of need.

Saito bowed at Kirche and the rest.

“S-Sorry.... Getting caught when we said we would go to rescue Tabitha... Guess that can't be helped, huh...”

Colbert tapped Saito's shoulder.

“As for the apologies, leave it until Miss Tabitha is rescued. There is no time to be relieved. Well then, the real thing is after this.”

Colbert then spread out a map on top of Derflinger. Everyone present became anxious, and looked at the map.

Colbert traced along one of the streets.

“We go to Gallia via a land route.”

“Can't we go using the ship?”

“Once your escape has been discovered, the first thing they would suspect is the *Ostland* which is sailing in the air now. Anyway, we came here to Tristania using that ship. The pursuers would probably think that we would escape in the same way. That's why we will use it against them. The *Ostland* shall attract enough attention and then head towards the opposite direction, Germania. The people in the royal palace will then think we are trying to enter Gallia via Germania.”

“I see.”

Kirche explained the remaining rationale.

“Besides that, if we crossed the country frontier in such a huge ship, wouldn’t we be discovered by the Gallian army immediately? After landing at Gallia, what would we do then? Wait aboard in the skies on standby? If we are discovered by the Gallian dragon knights, we would just be sunken like that!”

“Anyway, I don't want to use the ship for dangerous things. After rescuing Miss Tabitha, we will use the ship to travel east. Right?” With a teasing-like smile on his face, Colbert looked at Saito.

Yes! Touched, Saito nodded.

“Because of that, we should cross the country border on horses, and head

towards the old Orleans residence at the shore of Ragdorian Lake, which Miss Zerbst knew about. That is where Miss Tabitha's home is. Maybe there is some clue over there. Well then, for the time being, this is the plan. Everyone, any questions?”

“Can I ask one thing?”

“What is it?”

“Why do you help us so much? As a teacher, you should have your own stand right?”

Why do you ask such a thing? Colbert showed a strange look. “Miss Tabitha is my student. A teacher helping his student. Isn't that natural?”

When Tabitha woke up, she was in a dream country.

She was on a bed with a canopy, right at the center of a spacious room.

She was dressed in luxurious pyjamas that she had never worn before, not even during her times as a princess.

Tabitha looked for her glasses, and then noticed a pair of glasses studded with precious stones on a small table beside the bed. They were lying there on the table.

“.....”

Putting that on, she checked her body. She could not feel anything strange at all. Looking around, just like the bed and the accessories, the furniture around her was luxurious as well. It was the furniture of the previous Capet dynasty. The generation during which Gallia had thoroughly achieved the artistic, military, greatest splendor.

“Have you woken up?”

Tabitha turned towards where the voice came from, and there was the tall elf. Sitting on a couch near the entrance to the room, he was reading a book. Instantly, she looked around for her wand, but it could not be found anywhere. *If this is the case, I have no way to fight against him.*

Tabitha got down from the bed slowly. *This place is definitely not a dream country. Since the elf who defeated me so easily is here, this is but the prolongation of the fact.*

“Who are you?”

“Member of the Old Council of Nephthys... no, right now, I am but the Bidashal of Sahara.”

“Where is this place?”

“Alhambra Castle.”

The knowledgeable Tabitha knew the name of this castle. An old castle near the national border with Sahara, the elves' land. Its position was at the direct opposite of Ragdorian Lake. It looked like she had been brought there whilst she was still unconscious.

“Where did you put my mother?”

Tabitha repeated the same question as the other day. The tall elf replied her instantly.

“She's in a room beside here.”

Tabitha rushed out. Although she had run up to the door, the elf did not stop her. The room in which Tabitha was sleeping at was apparently a room designed to give shelter to nobles. Opposite the door, there was a small room for servants. Her mother was lying on a bed there.

“Mother.”

Whispering that, she rushed up to her. Her mother was snoring softly. Although Tabitha called out to her, she did not wake up. Evidently, she was deeply asleep.

At the mirror stand at the corner of the room, there was the doll Tabitha's mother thought to be her daughter. A doll she once bought for her. During that time, she named that doll “Tabitha”.

Mentally ill now, her mother called that doll “Charlotte”.

Since then, she called herself “Tabitha”. The doll which was like her other self, was lying casually on the mirror stand.

With great loathing, Tabitha glared at Bidashal who had peeked in from the door. In a crystal-clear voice, he said to Tabitha.

“You're creating a ruckus, please let her sleep.”

“What do you plan to do with us?”

As if he was looking at a desert rat he captured for experimental purposes, with eyes that contained little pity, Bidashal gazed at Tabitha.

“There are two answers to that.”

With Bidashal's words, Tabitha understood that her fate would be different from her mother's.

“What are you going to do with my mother?”

Firstly, Tabitha asked how her mother would be dealt with.

“Nothing at all. I was only ordered to 'guard' her.”

“What about me?”

After hesitating for a moment, Bidashal continued in the same tone as before.

“With the power of the Water Spirit, I will let you part with your heart. After that, I am ordered to 'guard' you.”

Tabitha understood instantly. This elf was saying that she would be made to be just like her mother.

“Now?”

“It is a special drug. Its preparation takes about ten days. You better enjoy the time left for you to the fullest.”

“You people made the drug which drove my mother crazy?”

Bidashal nodded.

“A drug that could have such consistent results, you humans would never be able to prepare something like this. Well then, although I pity you, I am also a captive-like being as well. I think this is the will of 'The Great Purpose' too, so give up.”

Tabitha stood up, and went towards a window in the room.

Under the radiant sun she could see the collapsed castle walls. Alhambra was supposed to be an abandoned castle, but when she looked at the furnished noble room, she thought that Joseph had probably renovated it.

Blocked by the castle walls, she couldn’t see the courtyard until the outside of the castle, but she was able to look down at the huge entrance protruding from the castle keep. Soldiers wielding lances and rifles were standing there. Although she did not know how many armed soldiers they were, since she did not have her wand, it was impossible to escape with her mother.

“My familiar?”

Realizing that Sylphid was not anywhere there, she asked.

“That rhyme dragon? It escaped.”

Apparently, he was able to see through Sylphid's true identity with just a look. It should have been a piece of cake for that tall elf.

It escaped. Tabitha was relieved that she was told that, but... Sylphid would surely inform those people at the Academy of Magic that Tabitha was captured.

Tabitha bit her lips.

Kirche and Saito's faces came to her mind.

She did not want them to think of things like trying their best to save them. Because she did not want to be a bother, she did not tell anyone about her departure at all.

But... it should be okay not to worry about that. Anyhow, the one who had captured Tabitha was Gallia. Coming to save her would be the same as looking for a brawl with the whole country. *Kirche or Saito would not think of taking such a risk. Especially Saito, isn't he a knight of the Imperial Guard now...?*

But, if it's Saito, he probably wouldn't mind taking such risks. Anyway, when it comes to that Saito, during that time when we fought to the death, he let me off without considering the risk to himself.

At her straying thoughts... Tabitha shook her head slightly.

Thinking about things like coming and going in such a way, huh...

Perhaps, I want them to come to rescue me.

How could it be?

I have always been doing things alone.

Besides... it is useless, whoever it is. The time left for me is only a little. After that, I will lose my heart due to the elf's drug. The Ancient Magic of the elves; humans can't do anything about it.

Although she was about to lose her heart, Tabitha was strangely calm.

No matter how I struggle against this elf, I definitely cannot win. Even when I had my wand, I could not succeed, so being unarmed now... our difference is probably like that of an ant and an elephant.

Having gone through countless battles until then as a Knight of the Northern Parterre, Tabitha excelled in analyzing battle abilities. Her excellent sense as a warrior told her the foolishness of resisting. Tabitha's cold heart was enveloped in a sense of helplessness she had never felt before. That sense of helplessness ripped off even the last bit of emotion she had- Anger.

Wearing this soft, resigned garment in her heart, Tabitha softly bit her lips.

“Being controlled by the feeling of such strange things, she could go to the same place as her mother.” She felt this small bit of relief.

Then, Bidashal told Tabitha.

“If you are bored, read a book. I have brought a few here.”

Bidashal pointed at the few books stacked in a row, which was apparently brought from the mansion of Orleans.

“This *The Hero of Ivaldi* book is really of great interest.”

Taking the book he was indulged with at the old mansion of Orleans, Bidashal murmured.

The Hero of Ivaldi was the most popular epic tale in Halkeginia.

Receiving the divine protection of Founder Brimir, Ivaldi the Hero used *swords* and *spears* and defeated various enemies- dragons, demons, demihumans...Because the original script no longer existed, besides the plot and the characters, it had branched off into innumerable variations - folklores, traditions, poems, plays, puppet shows...

Because the main character wasn't a noble mage, it was a popular work mainly among commoners.

“We elves have a legend which has a similar hero. Saint 'Anubis'. He is considered to have saved our land, Sahara during the 'great calamity'. According to this book, the hero Ivaldi's left hand could shine. Our 'Anubis' had a sacred left hand as well. Elves and humans are different, but this is a deeply interesting similarity.”

The tale of “The Hero of Ivaldi”, which was meant for the commoners, was not properly accepted in Halkeginia. Those who researched it were labelled “heretics” and “fools”, and it could not stand at the public stage of either theology or literature. There was even a period when it went through the painful experience of book burning. After all, this fairy-tale was said to have been made by the commoners who were then not pleased with the nobles' reign. It did not mean that all the “Hero of Ivaldi” stories which were conveyed had a left hand which could shine. There were some in which the hero was a female, and some,

male. There were also times when he was the son of god, or when it was his wife instead. He was also said to be just an ordinary human. It was a group of vague stories.

Bidashal handed “The Hero of Ivaldi” to Tabitha.

Obediently receiving the book, Tabitha sat down at the bed on which her mother was sleeping. Bidashal nodded, and left the room.

After sitting down by the bed and gazing at her mother's face... Tabitha recalled her childhood days. *To lull the fretful me to sleep, my mother had read a book to me at the bedside, just like this.*

During that time, the book she read most often, wasn't it the “Hero of Ivaldi”?

Slowly, Tabitha started flipping the pages of the book.

Although this would never be her object of research, “The Hero of Ivaldi” was interesting. Because of that, it was popular and widely read. She would not choose a moral and straightforward story. When she was small, Tabitha had engrossed herself in reading it before as well. Her interest would shift to other things eventually... Although she did not open the book after that, that which had taught her the fun of reading was this “Hero of Ivaldi” book.

The sounds of pages of a book being flipped could be heard in the quiet room.

While she flipped the pages, Tabitha read it out.

Just like how her mother did it in the past.

Ivaldi was stopped by Choment and other villagers. That is because he said he would go to the dragon's cave to save the feudal lord's daughter who had been harassing the villagers.

Casually looking at her mother, she noticed that she had awakened without her realizing it. And yet she had not awoken when she called out to her just now...

Tabitha tried to go and get the doll which was on the mirror stand. If her mother did not have the doll, she would be very upset. However... she noticed that her mother's behavior was different from usual.

She was staring at Tabitha with an astonished face. Usually, she would start making a fuss about “Return my daughter to me!” Yet, showing no interest at the doll on the mirror stand, she stared fixedly at Tabitha.

Maybe this passage from “The Hero of Ivaldi” made mother recall a little about the former days. Tabitha had given up, but now, within her heart, a small ray of hope shone through. Perhaps it would just be a hope that would lead to disappointment. But still, that hope was just like a stick of candle in the dark, glowing gently.

Tabitha continued reading out.

Choment asked Ivaldi,

“Oh, Ivaldi! Why are you heading towards the dragon's den? That girl had harassed you so much!”

Ivaldi answered,

“I don't know. Why? I don't know either. Just that there's something inside me which kept pulling me there steadily.”

Chapter 7: Settlement of the Past

Colbert's strategy turned out well.

Just as they planned, the pursuers from the Royal Palace were under the impression that Saito and the others who had escaped, went aboard the *Ostland*.

The instant the dragon knights flew into the air swiftly, the *Ostland* used its amazing speed and crossed the border between Tristain and Germania, fleeing into the territory of the Von Zerbst family.

Disguised whilst changing horses at a station on their journey, after rushing for a day and a half, they arrived at an inn town 10 leagues away from the country border.

The members of Tabitha's rescue team were: Saito, Louise, Kirche and Colbert, Guiche, Malicorne, and Montmorency, who said a healer was necessary - all seven of them. Because too many of them would attract attention, the rest of the Ondine acted as decoys and boarded the *Ostland*. Because of her injuries, Tabitha's dutiful sister, Irukukuu, stayed back at the academy.

After this, it would finally be the country border.

The tactic used to cross the country border was already planned. They would sneak into Gallia at night from the sky on the back of Sylphid who was following them from above. They had gone there on horsebacks because Sylphid, whose wounds were still not fully recovered, could not stand the weight of all seven of them for a long period of time.

“Compared to Tristain, the danger in Gallia should be less, right?”

Kirche said that. Indeed, they were wanted people in Tristain now, but they would be only seven of the multitude of illegal immigrants in Gallia. As long as they were not captured by anyone there...

“Anyway, I'm hungry! We can't fight if we're hungry.”

Malicorne said that, and the group entered the trendiest inn around. In an inn which had many travelers, the customers would not pay attention to Saito and the others who were at a table.

In order to sneak into Gallia, they had each disguised themselves as street performers.

Malicorne, who had raised his hand to call out to the waiter, was in a deep red outer coat, short pants, and pointed wooden shoes - the figure of a clown. He had also carefully colored the lower part of his eyes dark. At his well-matched figure, Saito burst into laughter.

Clad in merchant's clothes from the “Charming Fairies” Inn, Guiche had affixed a false mustache made from his hair under his nose, and he held some cotton in his cheek with his mouth. Upon doing that, he became a decent sake seller.

Kirche had changed into the costume of a dancer from the east. Wearing a diamond-studded circlet on her head, she became an attractive dancer who was not embarrassed no matter what she revealed (her body).

Similarly, Montmorency had changed into a very revealing dancer's costume as well. Because she was restlessly bashful, she looked somewhat suspicious.

Because there was no dancer costume which fitted Louise's body size, she became a plain village girl. Dressed in a dark green dress, her conspicuous pink hair was dyed light brown, hidden underneath a hood. She appeared to be the servant of that group.

Colbert was in a monk's attire. He was supposed to be a preacher traveling alongside them.

Saito had put on a hat with a feather on it. With his gaiters folded up, he carried Derflinger at his back ordinarily. He was said to be a sword dance performer.

This is the way the group of street performers was made up. Their costumes were strangely worn-out, but their appearance as a group heading towards Gallia was successful.

“Why do we have to wear such costumes!?” Montmorency said whilst trembling all over,

“Wouldn't we be declaring that we are nobles if we were to go there in our usual clothes?” Guiche said to sooth her down.

“Aren't there any other costumes? I don't want it! People will scrutinize me!”

The drunk customers would stare lustfully at the cloth covering Kirche and Montmorency's breasts, and the bulging out loincloth they were wearing. Having quite a high self-respect, Montmorency could not stand that.

“Revealing my belly button in public is unthinkable! What is this!? Isn't it indecent...?”

“It's all right, once in a while. It matches you!” Kirche said in a happy-like voice.

“That's because there are pitiful ones no one wants to look at...”

“What is that?? You're talking about me?”

Pulling down her hood, the servant girl, Louise, scowled at Kirche.

“You're quite relaxed huh. We're heading off to save your close friend, and yet you're still playing around?”

“So, if I knit my eyebrows like you and display a difficult face, I would win? If I can win just like that, I will do it as well.”

Gigigigigi Both of them glowered at each other.

“Quarreling? We have to get along together, and we have to succeed as well!”

Saito said that, and Colbert nodded too.

“It is just as Saito-kun said. That's because we're a team. Trivial conflicts can lead to huge cracks. Each of us has to understand that, and act accordingly.”

If Jean says so, I'll do it! Beaming, Kirche leaped onto him.

This group of street performers would sneak into Gallia that night, and head towards the old Orleans mansion.

“If we go there, we should be able to find some clues, huh?”

Munching slices of bread with a huge piece of ham in between, Saito asked Kirche.

“That child is of a royal family. If she was detained by the royal family, there should be something which implies the same treatment. We would definitely get some information. Besides, if we use our money, there is no news we can't get in the city.”

Kirche, who was mysteriously well-rehearsed with such affairs, drunk her wine whilst smiling sweetly. She should be confident in investigating their destination.

For the time being, because it would still be a while until night time, Saito and the others rested at the inn. They were tired after rushing for a day and a half.

The group rented a big room with two beds. Kirche quickly slipped into a bed, dragging Colbert along, and started snoring. Simply because they were sharing, Malicorne slipped beside him.

Guiche and Montmorency used the other side. Probably because he was turned on by the dancer figure, Guiche cheerfully extended his hands towards Montmorency, but she brushed his hands away, and pushed him to the opposite site reproachfully.

Louise and Saito sat down, leaning against the wall.

They looked outside the window, and it was still near mid-day. There were still about six hours to while away until evening.

“You're not sleeping?”

Louise asked Saito who was sitting next to her.

“Hm? If I were sleepy, I would have fallen asleep. But someone should stand guard, don't you think?”

With a carefree face, Saito said that.

Louise wanted to ask about the thing that had been bugging her all this while.

“Why do you go getting yourself involved in something so troublesome? I've said it, right? *“I'll find a way for you to get back.”* And yet, this time you plan to infiltrate a foreign country? For your information, this means danger beyond a war. If we are found, we are criminals! We don't have the honor, not even the rights as prisoners of war!”

“Exactly because of that, I came back for you.”

“Heeeyyy, I'm fine! Help the one who has been saving us so many times. No matter how you put it, that is the issue I have as a noble.”

“Didn't you stop being a noble?”

“I have only taken off my mantle, my heart is still that of a noble! A noble, that's how my heart is.”

“I'm the same as well.”

“Now I say... aren't you someone not from this world? You would have your own way of thinking!”

Folding his arms, Saito leaned against the wall.

“Be it a noble or commoner, there are different ways of acting as well, aren't there? Helping someone who has helped me. Isn't it natural for humans?”

“That's true, but...”

“That's not all. How do I say it... For whose sake have I fought and persisted this far? It was terrible, but I had fun. Ever since stopping the army of seventy thousand, when I was unconscious, I had been thinking. What can I do? Umm... The olden days... Japan... although that was where I was born, during the time I was there, I never had such a thought.”

Saito looked at Louise from the corner of his eyes.

“That's why, it's all right! I do it because I want to. It is not because I am obliged.”

Louise pondered about it.

She recalled what Derflinger had said some time back.

“His courage rising when he hears his master's incantations, is just like a mother beaming when she hears the laughter of her baby. Just like that, he can do it.”

What if Saito's “I want to do something for that someone.” feeling is also an

idea he has due to being Gandálfr?

The emblem I gave him would probably turn Saito into someone else.

And then, another suspicion.

Siesta's words just then came back to her.

“Aren't those the feelings of a familiar?”

In the prison of the palace, the thing she had been worrying about...

What if it isn't just the courage of plunging directly into danger? What if the “I love you” Saito told me is from him being Gandálfr as well?

These two questions swelled within her, squashing her. She didn't want to be confessed to with such feelings. But then, Saito was not wrong at all. It was all because of herself.

Louise became silent and hugged her knees. Because of that, Saito became worried.

“What's wrong? You became quiet suddenly...”

“Nothing!”

“You were the same in the palace as well. What is it!? Did I offend you?”

“Yeah... Just that every time you showed your courage, I became uneasy.”

Louise closed her eyes, and leaned against Saito. Saito embraced those shoulders.

Whilst looking at those hands on her shoulder, Louise muttered.

“Is it a lie or the truth? How am I supposed to tell...”

“What are you talking about?”

Louise shook her head.

“...It's nothing. Until night time, let's sleep.”

Saito was shook awake. When he opened his eyes, Kirche was in front of him.

“Now's the time.”

He rubbed his eyes, and noticed that it was already night, without him realizing. Saito became nervous. *It's okay, from now on we will be sneaking into Gallia.* The people around him had more or less the same feelings as well.

Malicorne who was in his clown costume, was clapping his face.

“What are you doing?”

“I-Increasing my spirit.”

Guiche leaned onto Montmorency's shoulder, and pointed towards the night sky.

“If I failed in my rescue mission and became like one of those shining stars...”

“We will give you a grand funeral.”

After that, Montmorency turned to everyone present and said,

“Although I go with you all for the time being because I'm worried, I won't do anything dangerous! Okay? I've said it already. I really don't like this rough stuff.”

“Okay! I'll try my best to protect you, even with my life!”

Montmorency fixed her eyes dubiously on Guiche who said that while hitting his chest.

“You are the most unreliable one! Sigh... I kept having this bad feeling. Life always prefers to deliver the things humans do not want...”

Whilst complaining, Montmorency inserted her wand in the opening of her dancer's costume.

That premonition of Montmorency's struck ten seconds later.

The group went down the stairs, and realized that somehow the inn was weird. Nobody was there. Lights were extinguished, and the doors were shut.

In general, an inn is a two-storied bar. This inn was not an exception. Wasn't now the busy season? Usually, it was unthinkable for it to be closed at such a time.

The group members exchanged glances. Pointing towards the door, Kirche nodded in Guiche's direction. Guiche shook his head, and looked at Malicorne. Malicorne gave a deep bow, and pointed towards Saito.

“Me?”

Saito said that, and everyone nodded.

“Smart...”

Whilst resenting his ability a little, Saito opened the door. *Giiiiiiiiiii*~~~ The door opened. Outside was already enveloped in darkness. Yet... as they thought, no one was there.

Saito turned back and said,

“...Somehow this feels so weird...”

At that instant, multiple beacon fires lightened up in unison.

Illuminated by the light of the fires, a crowd of soldiers appeared.

“Don't move! We're Her Majesty's Musketeer Corps! Throw away your wands, and give up quietly!”

Sure enough, standing right at the center of the soldiers was the one suited in an exaggerated battle armor - the leader of the Musketeer Corps, Agnes.

Apparently, they had evacuated the customers of this inn town, and had surrounded this area stealthily. An aptness which might be expected of the Musketeer Corps who were accustomed to carrying out errands behind people's backs.

“Agnes-san! It's me! Please let us off!”

Saito shouted. Nevertheless, within Agnes' face which was shone by the beacon fires, there wasn't any part of it which had the expression he saw in Albion.

With the iron-stiff face of a soldier, she declared coldly.

“I cannot let you all off. It is Her Majesty's order.”

Kirche poked her face out, and said in a breezy voice.

“Oh my. You're great, aren't you? How did you know that we are going to cross the country border on land?”

“If that ship is the head, then this side would be the back. During those times when we fought you mages, we have gotten used to attacking from the back.”

Those decoys won't work! With an attitude as if saying that, Agnes declared.

Agnes raised both her arms. The musketeers raised their rifles simultaneously.

“Please!! Our friend is in trouble! Even if it's you, you would still help your comrades if they were caught, right?”

“Didn't you help us out before this?”

Louise shouted as well. But, Agnes shook her head.

“I've already told you, haven't I? I am Her Majesty's sword. Although I understand how you all feel, an order is still an order. Enough, put down your wands! I do not want to fight you.”

Looks like they did not have anyone else to turn to. Since they were being aimed

at by the rifles, Sylphid could not land. If they were to board her, they would be turned into a beehive immediately. Counterattack was out of the question as well. To save Tabitha, they could not injure the Musketeer Corps.

It's all over.

“Let's reduce the musketeers to ashes.”

Kirche said readily. Saito shook his head.

“NO.”

“How about trying to drop their rifles with my Wind magic?”

“If you like, I can use my Earth magic to grab their ankles to immobilize them.”

Guiche and Malicorne said that. Montmorency warned them,

“You guys better stop. We don't know how many people they have. It's probably more than what we can see.”

“I agree with Miss Montmorency view. It is likely that there are more soldiers positioned in between houses and on the dark alleys, surrounding us,”

Colbert said while nodding.

“Teacher...”

In a small voice, Colbert instructed everyone.

“I'll construct a wall with my Fire magic. Within that time, you guys leave on the wind dragon!”

“Ha?”

“Jean, what are you talking about?”

However, Colbert looked serious.

“Agnes-dono will be shaken the moment she sees me. We should be able to earn a little time.”

Kirche's expression changed.

“Jean! You can't do this!”

Everyone was astonished at Kirche who had become grave. That is because apart from Kirche, no one else knew about the animosity between Colbert and Agnes.

As if admonishing Kirche, Colbert said.

“We have no choice but to do this.”

“I'll stay behind as well. I'll talk to that commanding officer of the Musketeer Corps properly.”

“I thought no one else knew Miss Tabitha's mansion apart from you? You all go to Gallia, and save her at any cost!”

Being told that, Kirche became silent. She then nodded with a bitter look.

“Wait teacher! Although I don't really get it, we cannot just let you do that!”

Saito shouted angrily as well. Colbert shook his head.

“Enough, leave this to me and leave now!”

Pushing Saito aside, Colbert went out of the door.

Agnes looked stunned for a moment. Not wasting that opportunity, Colbert whistled. Sylphid who had been waiting for them at the sky landed.

The moment Sylphid landed, Colbert recited the spell for the “Fire Wall”.

From the ground, torrents of flames surged up and created a wall between Sylphid and Agnes.

“Teacher!”

“Now, let's go!”

Kirche pulled the roaring Saito by his arm. Malicorne who had gone on ahead of them, cast a wind spell on Saito and dragged him up as well. Following that,

Kirche jumped on as well.

“Go! Sylphid!”

Kyui! With a purr, Sylphid flew up. In the blink of an eye, the figures of Colbert, Agnes and her musketeers became too small for them to see with their naked eyes.

In a hurt voice, Saito said,

“Damn it, not even Agnes would help us. Will you be all right... teacher?”

Casually looking at Kirche, Saito held his breath. Kirche's demeanor was one that would not lose its carefree-ness no matter what. But at that moment, biting her lips strongly, a fire-like fury was on her face.

“Kirche...”

Louise said in a worrying voice, but Kirche did not even reply.

“...That girl. If you dare to touch even a hair on my Jean, I'll burn all your hair to ashes...”

Noticing the ascending Sylphid, Agnes returned to her senses. The next thing which came out of her, was the order to shoot.

“Shoot!!”

The musketeers who had readied their rifles, pulled their triggers at once.

In the night sky, gunshot sounds echoed.

However... Sylphid had already risen too high up, and the bullets could not reach her. Within the thick gunpowder fume which hanged about in the air, Agnes was stunned.

She had shot at her friends.

She had shot at the student whom she taught swordsmanship.

She was ordered to “Capture them!” but... obviously there was no intention to kill. She did not intend to seriously capture them. And yet, she had given the order to shoot immediately...

It can't be helped, Agnes shook her head. *I am a soldier. Carrying out orders faithfully is the meaning of my existence.*

Above that... this guy.

For Agnes, above her duties, there was but one other thing which was close to her heart.

Revenge.

Agnes scowled at Colbert loathfully.

[Translator's note: All the "you" Agnes direct towards Colbert is the well-known "kisama", which loosely means "you bastard"]

“You're alive? I thank God. Because I was thinking that you had died, I had lost my reason to carry on with my life. Well then, let's settle this properly. Draw your staff!”

But, Colbert did not ready his wand. *Poinkk* He threw it away, and sat down.

“What's wrong!? Pick up your wand!”

“Please kill me. My lady has the right to do so.”

“What did you say!?”

Agnes lost her tongue.

“Although my lady has shot at my students, I do not hate you. I understand that because I was a soldier as well. Just now, didn't you say it, Agnes-dono? *‘I am Her Majesty's sword.’* I was the same too. I was *the kingdom's wand*. If I was given the order to ‘reduce everything to ashes,’ I would carry it out faithfully. I

had always been thinking that that was the way for righteous nobles.”

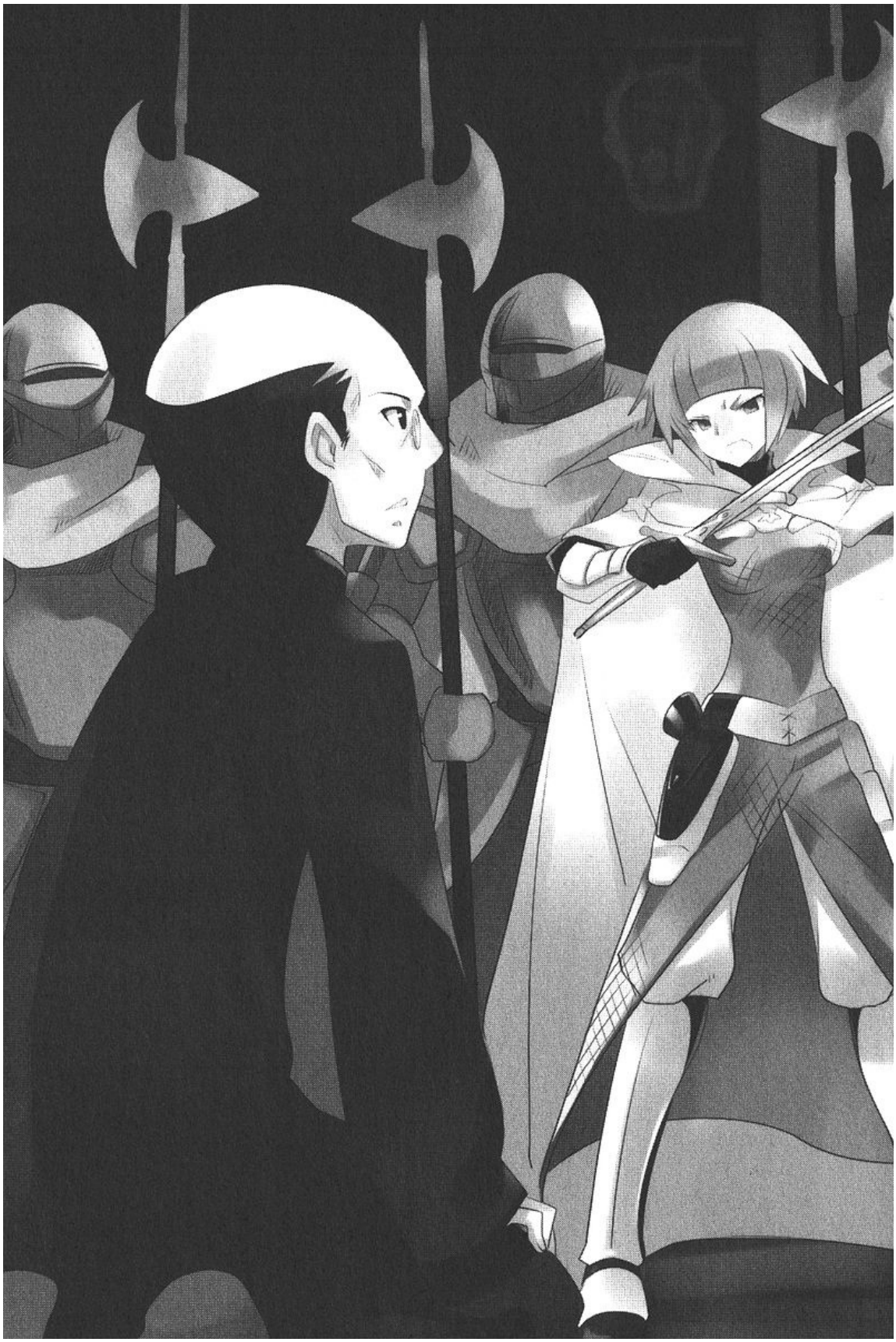
“SILENCE!”

“But, my lady's village... no, when I burned those innocent people to ashes, I felt that it was wrong. That's because I was a human being before being ‘the kingdom's wand.’ No matter what reason it could be, there was no way that burning innocent people was all right. Be it an order or whatever it was, that was not something permissible.”

“Enough, pick up your wand!”

“I devoted myself to research. I thought that bringing happiness to many people on my own is an atonement I can do. No… saying ‘atonement’ is prideful. This is my ‘responsibility.’ For me, devotedly serving the living people in this world is my ‘responsibility.’ That's because even if I were to choose to die, I cannot be forgiven as well.”

“You bastard, you think that by devotedly serving the world, your sins would disappear? You're saying that by serving this world, me, my family, and my friends' sorrow would clear up!?”



“It would not be able to. There is no way it would clear up. My sins will not disappear. They will never disappear. Sins are like that. Because of that, I offer my life to you. Although it is prideful for me to choose my death... the only one who can decide my death is here. It's my lady. As the sole survivor of the village, my lady holds the right to kill me as a consolation for the others.”

Agnes closed her eyes.

After that, *krrk* She opened her eyes, and approached Colbert in long strides. With his eyes open, Colbert kept staring ahead.

Agnes raised her sword overhead, but Colbert still did not close his eyes.

The sword flashed.

However... blood did not splatter upwards. The thing Agnes cut apart, was the priest's clothing Colbert was wearing. The back of his neck was slashed at, and the nape of his neck could be seen.

The scar of a burn wound could be seen on it.

Agnes' memories traced back 20 years ago.

In the blazing village... she was carried by someone on his shoulder.

It was a man who had an ugly scar of a burnt wound at his neck.

When she came to, she was at a beach, wrapped in blanket, sleeping.

That man had saved her. Was it on a whim? Or is it awareness of his sins? She still did not know that until now.

The only thing she knew was... the one who had burned down her village, and the one who had saved her, was the man in front of her now. *“What an irony,”* Agnes murmured.

She had grown accustomed to asking herself why she was saved.

But at this moment, whatever.

While sheathing her sword, Agnes told him in a low voice.

“It was 129 people. REMEMBER. You, serve humans ten times...no, a hundred times of that amount.”

With a sorrowful expression, Colbert shook his head.

“It was 131 people.”

“What!?”

“Two lives in a pregnant woman.”

Agnes looked up to the sky.

The two moons were covered by the clouds, and could not be seen. Deep darkness was the only thing enshrouding the sky.

“I will never forgive you. No matter how many times I would be reincarnated, I will abhor you. But... vengeance is a chain. A chain which would extend forever if it is not severed somewhere by someone. If I kill you, your students would probably hate me, and would never forgive me. Jean Colbert. That's why, be grateful to your students! Because I have cut the chains today, here.”

Agnes jerked Colbert's chin.

“Come! If I don't at least bring you back, I cannot account to Her Majesty.”

Colbert stood up, and gave Agnes a deep bow. At that state, both of them did not move for a while. The members of the Musketeer Corps were perfectly still as well.

After a while, Agnes started walking. Colbert walked out as well.

“You are not arresting me?”

“I don't think you would run away.”

Whilst walking, Agnes said in a stiff voice,

“I can understand what you said. *That* is what is called a good soldier. One who responds just like a puppet when receiving orders. Just now, I shot at the student whom I had taught swordsmanship. By the time I realized, I had already given

the order to shoot. Whether it hit them or not was not the issue. I attacked my student, my friends. Your words, I have really understood them.”

Tears welled up and overflowed from Agnes' eyes. The iron lady, commanding officer of the Musketeer Corps, let her tears flow in front of everyone.

“I can't forgive the me who understood what you said.”

The Musketeer Corps and Colbert walked towards the carriage prepared for their journey towards Tristania.

Chapter 8: The Old Mansion of Orléans

By the time they finally crossed the country frontier and arrived at the old mansion of Orléans, it was well past midnight.

The twin moons could be seen from the openings between the clouds.

The old mansion of Orléans was illuminated by both the mist that drifted from the Ragdorian Lake and the light from the twin moons. It stood out strangely in the night.

“So this is Tabitha's home...” Saito murmured.

Louise hid behind Saito's back, and peeked at the mansion.

Guiche gulped, and grasped his artificial flower-like wand tightly.

Montmorency was checking Sylphid's condition, on whom they were sitting. Sylphid, whose injury had not fully recovered but had flown them there anyway, was gasping for breath. Montmorency cast a Water spell on her..

“Sylphid, are you all right?”

“Kyui!”

From the gate, the driveway that was as wide as a horse carriage led directly towards the entrance hall. Trees grew luxuriantly on both sides, causing the darkened mansion to further emanate an ominous feeling.

“Well then, look out...”

Guiche said that, and Kirche stepped out quickly.

“O-Oi Kirche! Isn't it dangerous!? We've got to start off with a strategy!”

“If the enemy comes out, then that would be convenient. If the enemy had laid a trap, the strategy would not work!”

Kirche headed straight towards the entrance hall, and opened the door wide.

Giiiiii Making a heavy sound, the door opened.

The cold silence drifted about the hall.

“Nobody is here.”

With their respective weapons readied, the group searched carefully through the mansion. While walking down the corridor, Guiche noticed the wound on the wall.

“There was a fight here...”

A broken gargoyle rolled over. Kirche approached and examined the gargoyle that looked like a fencer.

“What's wrong?”

Louise asked, and Kirche snorted.

“That girl's Wind magic... did not have the usual power.”

“What do you mean?”

“Such destructive power is not from Triangle magic. It's the power of a Square-class.”

Louise and Saito peered at the gargoyle Kirche pointed at. It was completely sliced into half by wind blades or something else. Although she said that this was of a Square-class, Louise still did not understand.

Saito could surmise nothing but “Its sharpness is awesome,” but since Kirche had passed the verdict, its power should be quite strong indeed.

Tabitha's footprints were under the broken gargoyle.

Lying deep within the place, there was a room.

Opening the door, the group went in.

That place was in horrible condition.

As if a tempest had broken out, the inside of the room was a complete mess. The furniture that was originally a bed was ripped apart, becoming feathers, wood, cloth, and fine fragments, scattered all about the room. Many cuts were on the wall.

The windows at the wall opposite the entrance were blown out; the outside could be seen.

Kirche meticulously started to examine the bed.

Pointing at a section of the bed, she called them together.

“Look here. At this point on the bed, looks like Tabitha had chanted a tornado-like spell.”

Indeed. With that point as its centre, hurricane-like cuts were inflicted outwards all the way to the wall.

“Uwah... What if the devastation of this room is...”

Saying that, Guiche gazed at the desolate room.

“Yeap. It is caused by that magic. Or rather, that *has* to be it.”

Guiche and Malicorne gulped. They imagined the power of that spell. Kirche whispered in a cheerful-like voice.

“Releasing such a strong magic, that girl still can lose? What on earth was her opponent like? Besides...”

Unnoticed, Sylphid had poked her head into the hole of the wall. The size of the hole was about the same as Sylphid's head.

“You opened that hole? Sylphid?”

Kyui, Sylphid nodded.

“What was Tabitha's enemy?”

Sylphid extended her front leg out on top of her head. At that gesture, Kirche recognized a certain word, and muttered,

“Elf?”

Sylphid nodded vigorously.

The whole group held their breath.

“Elf!” Guiche's eyes bulged, and he trembled all over from fear.

“It's a hard enemy!” Malicorne shouted.

“No way! Elf...”

As expected, Kirche bit her lips. Louise hugged her shoulders, worried.

“Oi, oi! Are elves that dangerous? You guys are always alarmed at elves...”

When it came to elves, Saito had known none other than Tiffania. He could not think of her being as dangerous as they said, but...

“Ask your sword. He should probably tell you how powerful elves are.”

Saito unsheathed Derflinger.

“Hey Derf!”

“You'd only talk to me at times like this, don't you!?”

Derflinger answered in a sulky voice.

“Don't say such things! Everyone is somehow frightened by elves but... Are they really that scary?”

“Scary!”

Derflinger answered readily.

“How-How could this be...”

“If the opponent is an elf, the odds are still against a Square Mage.”

Montmorency muttered with a troubled face.

“What!? Seriously!?”

“Their power lies in the magic they use. The 'Ancient Magic,' I haven't witnessed it, but it is said that they could recite spells without even holding a wand. It is said that the elves are more skillful than any other race at handling the Ancient Magic.”

“Hey Derf. What's this 'Ancient Magic' thingy? It's that right? The thing the Water Spirit is said to be using. Besides, didn’t you also say that you can move because of some 'Ancient' stuff?”

“More or less. Ancient Magic is an art that existed long before the magic elements were being created; magic that controls the 'power of life'. The magic elements you people recite are displaying the effects of changing the 'logic' according to the power of each individual's will, but.... Ancient Magic runs alongside the 'logic'.”

“Explain in simpler terms.”

“The point is, the utilization of the power of nature which exists everywhere. Life force, wind, fire, water... every possible energy source. An individual's will, or the power of nature - you don't have to imagine which one is stronger.”

“Well then, the elf who captured Tabitha is someone who manipulates this strong Ancient Magic. Tell us of this power!”

“Perhaps the wind dragon knows more than me.”

“Sylphid?”

“Hey rhyme dragon, how much longer do you want to play dumb?”

“Rhyme dragon?”

Everyone present looked blank. Only Louise and Montmorency who had been studying hard gasped.

“How could it be... but haven't rhyme dragons been extinct since a long time ago...?”

“If there's one here, then they can't have gone into extinction.”

“Hey Sylphid. I don't really get it, but you're that - rhyme dragon? What's that?”

Sylphid gazed at Saito with her round eyes. After that, with a troubled-looking expression, *Kyui kyui*, she started shaking her head.

“It's saying it isn't.”

“Hey rhyme dragon. Your master probably ordered you to 'never reveal your true identity,' but... now's not the case she was referring to, isn't it? Your beloved master has been captured. It's sort of an emergency. In your easiest way, tell them the dreadfulness of the 'Ancient Magic'.”

In a troubled face, Sylphid started shaking her head even more rigorously.

“Kyuikyui! Kyuikyui!”

After that, as if she had an idea, she closed her eyes, and opened her mouth wide. Standing right in front of her, Saito leaped back instantly.

“Wh-What are you doing?? You want to eat me!?”

In a desperately close voice, a sound different from Sylphid's cry was squeezed out of her throat.

“I'm not eating you! Kyui!”

Except Derflinger, everyone present opened their mouths wide. Rooted to the ground, Malicorne screamed.

“The dragon! The dragon spoooookkkkkeeeeeeee!”

“So I cannot speak? That's enough! Onee-sama instructed me not to speak, so I had controlled it all along! But that sword over there spoke as well! Kyui, kyui!”

After that, Sylphid started sobbing in a sorrowful voice.

“Aaahhh! I've broken my promise with Onee-sama! I've promised never to speak out! Kyu~~i! Kyu~~~i!”

Guiche and Malicorne were screaming about anxiously, but Louise and Montmorency, who more or less already knew some details about rhyme dragons, and Saito, were relatively calm. Saito was astonished as well, but he coped with it composedly. *So what if this dragon can talk?*

Even the lump of water and the owl spoke. By then, Saito was no longer very surprised by this speaking dragon.

“What's a rhyme dragon?” He asked Louise.

“They're legendary dragons of the ancient times. Possessing high intelligence, excelling in languages and senses, manipulating Ancient Magic... powerful mythical creatures!”

“Ehh? You're that great?”

Saito gently stroked Sylphid's snout. In a happy voice, *Kyui!*, Sylphid purred.

“Hey rhyme dragon. Show them a little of the greatness of Ancient Magic.”

In a mischievous voice, Derflinger asked Sylphid.

“We don't call it 'Ancient'. I want you to call it the 'power of the spirits'. We have only borrowed it for a while.”

“Well then, show them a little of this 'Power of the spirits' thing.”

Sylphid sighed, and began chanting. Instead of runes, spoken incantations could be heard from her.

“O wind which clothes me, change my shape!”

Wind coiled about Sylphid, and turned into a blue swirl.

Taken aback, everyone stared at Sylphid. The blue swirl shone, and vanished in the blink of an eye.

Upon that... Sylphid which was supposed to be there had disappeared. In her place was a young lady around 20 years of age. A beautiful lady with long, blue hair.

Or rather, that person was...

“You! Aren't you that Irukukuu!?”

“Uwah! You are Sylphid in disguise!?”

Saito and Guiche jumped back in surprise. Introducing herself as Tabitha's dutiful younger sister, she was the woman appearing in front of Saito and the others now.

“Oh well, it's more or less that feeling. If I borrow the power of the spirits, it is a piece of cake to even take your human forms.”

Magnificently... she turned into a human's form. As expected, she could not transfigure her clothes as well, so her figure was like that of a newborn.

A newborn.

Naked.

Kiching! Louise shot a glance at Saito. *The other day, because she dropped down crashing through the ceiling of the shed, you couldn't truly appreciate her right?*

However now she knew her opponent was Sylphid. If this was the case, restraint should not be necessary. Blushing furiously, Saito and the other guys had their eyes fixated on Sylphid's body.

As if expressing the hugeness of her breasts, Guiche moved his hands in a bowl-shape in front of his chest.

Shaking his head, Saito sketched a bowl of bigger diameter than Guiche's.

The instant Malicorne joined in the meeting and nodded a big yes at Saito, Louise's high kick landed squarely on the back of Saito's head. He tumbled forwards, and at the same time, the water torture spell that Montmorency had completed, was cast on Guiche.

Louise spread the outer coat of her unfashionable dark green dress on Sylphid.

“Wear this.”

“Ehhh~~~, it's stiff, I don't want! Kyui.”

“Don't 'kyui' with me. Wear it.”

Being glared at by Louise's demon-like eyes, Sylphid put it on reluctantly. Because Louise's size was small, her breasts became lively wobbling about, displaying their fine quality. Noticing Saito who had fallen onto the bed secretly gazing at Sylphid, Louise kicked him from behind between his legs.

He yelled and rolled on the bed and Louise sat down on his back with a thump.

“I know how great 'Ancient Magic' is.”

Montmorency nodded as well.

“Uh-huh. For such a big body to become so small. Moreover, no matter how I look at her, what a fine human being indeed. What a great achievement. Something impossible even by a water element user, regardless of how powerful she is.”

Triumphantly, Sylphid purred, “Kyui kyui!”

Revealing her true form and becoming able to talk, it became easier for Sylphid to convey her thoughts, but... Sylphid did not know much about the details.

“That's why I thought it unnecessary for me to talk.”

Anyway, Sylphid's explanation was as follows:

There was an elf here.

Tabitha recited a super cool snowstorm spell. (The markings on the wall and the bed were made at that time.)

With a ridiculously composed attitude, the elf did not even try to avoid it.

An amazing event occurred next. The instant the snowstorm appeared to have wrapped around him, it was repelled, and attacked Tabitha instead. Tabitha had fallen by her own magic.

In a fit of rage, Sylphid broke through the wall and attacked him, but she was quickly defeated too.

She did not really know why.

“That's about it.”

As if saying “what to do next”, she turned her breasts away. It was quite crude a report, but, oh well, they could understand the general picture.

“Which is to say, whether he used the Ancient Magic or something else- even this itself is fishy.”

Louise commented, and Kirche nodded too.

“Coming from you, that is quite a good analysis.”

“What—do—you—mean!?”

At Louise who glared at her, pointing at the bed and the wall, Kirche said.

“Apart from Tabitha's magic, no other offensive magic was used here. What Ancient Magic did that elf actually use, I wonder. Was that really being used?”

Everyone present fell silent. It was as if the reasonless terror crushed them.

Using unknown magic, an unknown enemy...

A dread different from that of the Albion army.

If the enemies are mages, there should be a counter attack against them.

If the enemy is an army, there is also some room for negotiations.

But... elves are different.

Rumour or legend says that, whichever Tristanian who walks alone, the chances of them meeting one is practically none in these hundred years.

“Hey, who took Tabitha away? We know how he fought, defeated and captured her, but we must find a clue to their destination and talk with them. Anyway, let's find that clue!”

Saying that, Saito tried to leave the room, but no one else apart from Kirche moved.

“What's with you guys!? Aren't you all afraid?”

“The e-elf is... umm, a really serious problem, I think.”

Guiche lowered his head and muttered.

“It is said that those people eat the humans they capture! Killing women and children without mercy! They're not just cruel, but also terribly strong. Apparently, they can destroy a small country overnight with only 10 people.”

“What's your problem!? That's enough! Is there actually anyone who could travel all the way here and get cold feet!? Why did you come all the way to Gallia? Isn't it to save Tabitha? Won't all our troubles in arriving here be in vain? Didn't teacher sacrifice himself to be the decoy and let us off??”

Despite that, Guiche, Malicorne and Montmorency still did not move. With troubled-like faces, they were just fidgeting.

At that instant.

From the gap of the door to which the corridor led, a shadow appeared.

Saito quickly grasped Derflinger and readied it. Next, Kirche released her magic without any restrain.

A huge fireball struck the door, which flared up showily.

“Please stop! Please stop!”

The shrieks of the person down the corridor could be heard. As if the voice was

familiar, Kirche's eyes became round.

“Percerin? Aren't you Percerin?”

“Oh my oh my, isn't that the voice of Zerbst-sama?”

Peeking timidly was the old butler of the Orleans mansion - Percerin. Upon seeing Kirche, he started shedding tears.

“It is an honor to be able to meet you again.”

“What on earth has happened?”

Kirche asked. Crying, Percerin began his story.

“The day the good-for-nothing king's army turned up was that night, three days ago. Ah, I was a coward. Right after seeing the commissioned officer bearing his wand, and scary wand-bearing troops, I was frightened immediately. Forgetting even to protect Madame, I hid in a small room on the other side of the wall. Even after the king's troops left, I was still afraid, and did not leave the small room. That's because the scary elf was in the room.”

“Madame is Tabitha's mother”, Kirche explained to the others.

“The king's troops made Madame fall asleep with a weird spell, and took her with them. I was terrified and hid inside the small room the whole time. The next day, Charlotte-sama turned up, and confronted that elf. Aah! Charlotte-sama's magic at that time! Its power was something I have not seen nor heard in the 10 years I have been serving here! Even I, who was hiding on the other side of the wall, was practically frozen. The force of the wind seemed to be blowing the entire mansion off! And yet, whether the elf received Charlotte-sama's scary magic...”

“We know. That elf took Tabitha away, right?”

“Yes. I am sure of it. The wind dragon had fallen as well. Carrying Tabitha in his arms, he took her away. Aah, if only these old bones of mine could use magic! No, if I were at least of an age when I could wield a sword! I would never have handed Madame and Miss over to the king's army!”

“Do you know where Tabitha was brought to?”

Percerin shook his head.

“I do not know...”

“I see, that's a shame.”

Kirche and Saito dropped their shoulders.

“Great. So we can only look for her on foot?”

“Let's proceed to Lutéce and look for every informer.”

Percerin then spoke to the two who were discussing.

“But I know the place Madame was taken to.”

“Eeeh??”

“The troops who kidnapped Madame talked about it. *“Carry her all the way to Alhambra Castle, huh? Geez, isn't that on the other side?”*”

Kirche grinned from ear to ear, and shook Percerin's hands.

“Zerbst-sama?”

“That's very helpful! There's nothing to be ashamed of. You couldn't be a knight, but you have brought us some great information!”

“But... Charlotte-sama's location is...”

“The same. No reason for it to be different.”

“What's this 'Alhambra Castle'?”

“A castle located at the far east of the Kingdom of Gallia. Isn't that a famous old battlefield?”

“Is it that plot of land over which there were formerly countless quarrels with the elves? My ancestors who joined the holy land liberation army were killed by

elves there.”

Guiche said in a frightened voice. Continuing, with the same tone,

“My ancestors were the same. Joining the last holy land liberation troops, they were defeated badly by the elves, and retreated. My ancestors told us: *“Even if you make the nobles in Halkeginia your foes, never make the elves your enemy.””*

Frowning, Montmorency started speaking as well,

“Well, there were a few cases when the Halkeginia nobles had won the war against the elves... An example would be the Battle of Toule . Gallia and Tristain combined forces, clashed into the elven army at the east side of Sahara and won. However, during that time, their army numbered 70,000.”

“Didn't the elven troops number only 2,000?”

“Apparently, the real figure was 500. They were too anxious, so the figure reported increased a few times,” Guiche corrected Malicorne's words.

“In other words, to defeat the elves, an army with 10 times their might is necessary.”

Amazed, Kirche asked,

“Wasn't it already decided that we're going to confront the elf?”

“Exactly. It is just as Kirche said. We already know the location... I'm going!”

The other four stared motionlessly at Saito and Kirche who had stepped out... and then helplessly chased after them. In a delighted tone, Sylphid purred *Kyui, kyui* as well, following them.

Percerin gave a full bow at all of them.

“Please! My lords and ladies! I beg of you, please save Madame and Miss!”

Being entrusted with that, Kirche waved her hand.

Louise gazed anxiously at Saito who had stepped out quickly.

If it's Kirche, I can understand.

Aren't those two close friends?

But, Saito was not like that. Although Tabitha saved us from danger for countless times...'

Putting that aside, Saito's courage...

Although the others said how scary elves are, he did not show even a tinge of fear.

As I thought, that courage was Gandálfr's.

Saito turned back.

“What's wrong, Louise? Let's go.”

Shaking her head, Louise shook off her uneasiness, and went after Saito.

Chapter 9: Alhambra Castle

Alhambra Castle was a citadel the elves built on top of a small hill in the desert.

The incident of the Halkeginia Holy Land Recovery Allied Forces, who regained it at the price of countless sacrifices, could be traced back to thousands of years ago.

During that time, the Holy Land Recovery Allied Forces fixed the country border, and told the elves, “This is our land.” Consequently, that became the country's borders.

The elves who had formerly lived in the desert did not have any concept of “country borders.” Just that, the elves knew that humans are living beings who would greedily treat anywhere as their land and fight for it, if “country borders” were not established. So, they reluctantly recognized the line those humans drew as the country border.

Because that citadel became the point from which the elves' land was attacked from many times, they received the elves' attacks many times as well. Every time, this process of trying to remove and being removed repeated...until that battle hundreds of years ago, in which the Holy Land Recovery Allied Forces became its present master. Since the citadel was small, it was left aside as a military base and became an abandoned castle... because of which, it conversely flourished.

At the foot of the hill on which Alhambra Castle was built, an oasis was formed. A small inn town started growing from around that oasis... Because the area surrounding Alhambra Castle was a military base, travellers who passed through the desert would stop by, and it became a small trading area.

With the skills of the elves, the walls of Alhambra Castle were exquisitely constructed, adorned with a fine engraving of geometric patterns. Reflecting the moonlight from the twin moons, the walls shone brightly, providing a fantastic

view to the desert travellers.

To the Halkeginians, the area surrounding Alhambra Castle was an exotically beautiful place.

Well then, in a small pub called “Father Joseph's Desert Doors” Inn, in that beautiful inn town, the hot topic was a recent rumor about Alhambra Castle.

A unit of the king's army arrived, and was stationed in the castle.

The merchants who bought ceramics and porcelains in Sahara said to the shop owner in a whisper.

“The troops came to Alhambra Castle lately... but do you know why those guys came, Father?”

Travelling from one place to another, the wise father who had set up a pub here, tasted the stew whilst shaking his head.

“Dunno.”

“*“Didn't those guys come to this area to dig up some treasure?”* There was a rumor like that, but... I feel that the truth is different.”

“Is it?”

The father reacted indifferently. He knew that not poking his head in unnecessary affairs was the secret to longevity.

“Hey. I'll treat you a drink, so tell me more about that rumor?”

“Not interested.”

Missing out on getting some wine? The male merchant snorted. Beside him, a lady clothed in sand-warding robe with a hood sat down.

“Isn't that a wonderful conversation?”

The brown skin and red lips peeking out from the openings of the robe gave the impression of a befitting beauty. The merchant gulped nervously.

“Dear, shall we offer up a cup for this man?”

The man's cup was filled with ale to the brim.

“Thanks! Hihi.”

“Well then, can you tell me more about it?”

The whole group greeted Kirche who returned to the table with applause. On top of their street performer costumes, everyone was wearing the same robe used in the desert.

The group had finally arrived at this Alhambra place the previous night.

It took them a week of transferring between stagecoaches travelling through footpaths and highways to reach there from the Orleans mansion. Apparently, Tristain did not issue any warning to Gallia, and the performers were not suspected by any people as they walked down the road. No. On their journey, they were suspected by the patrolling knights several times, but managed to escape by the tactfulness of Kirche who knew the area very well.

“Geez, you guys...always letting me get information by myself, what's your intention?”

“But aren't you the best? Just the person for the job.”

Guiche nodded solemnly too.

“Awesome... 'cause you managed to collect information one after another,” Saito said in admiration.

“Really, just do it. Guys, if you all are still Tristain nobles, with a high pride- no wonder you can't gather information.”

Montmorency turned her face aside in embarrassment, but Louise lifted up her eyes.

“Oh, yes we can! I went as far as being a waitress in a bar in Tristania last time!”

“That pathetic fella?”

Louise's cheeks swelled. Come to think of it, she had let herself be seen a few times by Kirche. But now was not the time for such things, so she had no choice but to keep quiet.

“So, did you get anything?”

The merchant to whom Kirche gave an extravagant treat had told her everything he knew, after which, he became drunk and wasted, lying down on the counter, and fell asleep.

They changed their strategy meeting location to a second floor room. That's because there were people there.

After entering the room, Kirche started telling the news she heard.

“As I thought, looks like it really is this city.”

“Which means?” Saito urged.

“Apparently, that merchant heard about it from the troops stationed there. The reason they came here was to protect a “noble” they brought here. According to the story, they seemed to be fallen royal family members. And then, the crux is that those nobles are 'parent and child.'”

“In other words, Tabitha and her mother?”

“Can't we conclude that?”

Everyone's faces turned solemn.

“I'm back.”

Opening the door of the room, Malicorne entered.

“I used the 'Distant Vision' spell and examined the castle!”

Being a Wind element mage, Malicorne had been using magic to examine the

castle from afar. Even Sylphid was not used, since it would be conspicuous. She had remained in her human form until then, and probably due to tiredness, she was asleep on the bed, snoring. It looked like taking the form of a human consumed her willpower more intensely.

Calmly, Malicorne spread a sketched parchment on the table. On it, a rough sketch of Alhambra Castle could be seen. Obviously, the internal structure of the building was not known, but the courtyard, walls, towers, keeps - all of them were drawn accurately.

“Good job!”

“Splendid...”

Guiche praised him.

“The Gallian troops stationed there aren't just one squadron. There are two squadrons there! About 300 soldiers, and 10 noble officers!”

That's quite a number.

“I see. Thanks. Well then, we've collected all the information we can.”

Kirche was fully the leader. Indeed, in such projects, there was no chance for Tristainian nobles who were prideful and only knew how to carry out frontal attacks.

“So, how to rescue Tabitha out of that castle?”

“We are mostly mages. A surprise attack against approximately 300 people will work somehow, won't it? At our side, we have Sylphid, Saito who stopped the seventy thousand...”

Guiche said that, but Kirche shook her head.

“No way. If we attack head-on like that, reinforcements would come immediately, and danger might fall onto Tabitha. It's also possible that Tabitha would be carried away to somewhere else.”

“So what should we do? Putting all of the soldiers to sleep with magic?”

“That's right.”

Kirche grinned impishly.

“That's impossible! Aren't we going against 300 people?? Even if we were to recite Sleep Cloud, how can we cover them all in one shot?”

“To make them sleep, we don't just have to use incantations, Montmorency.”

“Whaat?”

“Can you mix the 'Sleeping Potion?'”

“I can, but... how to make them drink it? Even if we mix it into their water, it will be discovered immediately!”

“There's a plan. Just do it! Mix the strongest potion you can. Guiche, please buy some wine sold nearby.”

“Got it.”

Towards them who were about to rush out, Kirche said.

“Hey, if you meet any elves...”

The three of them trembled instantly. A word they did not want to hear. Mustering their courage, they had been driving that word out of their head.

“Run. Don't think about fighting them. The thing which must not be forgotten is, we did not come to fight. The elves are obviously with the Gallian army. We will sneak into Alhambra Castle cautiously, and carefully rescue Tabitha and her mother. That's right. We've come 'to save our friends.' That would be putting the cart before the horse. That's why, if you feel danger not just from elves, run. That is cowardly, but harmless.”

Understood, The three nodded.

“Thanks for cooperating in this plan to save my best friend. I am grateful for your bravery.”

Kirche bowed politely. It was their first time seeing Kirche being so

commendable. Because of that, they changed their frightened expressions to serious looks.

After the three of them exited, Kirche turned towards Saito and Louise.

“Well then...”

“What are we supposed to do? What's best for us?”

“Rest. You guys are our trump card. Please conserve your strength.”

“Trump card, what do you mean?”

Kirche readily answered.

“To fight against the elf. Although we can trick the army, the elf probably won't fall for it.”

“Wh-! What!? You're saying that it's okay even if we're hurt!? We may die, won't we?? You're saying that it's all right if we die?? We're not a trump card, but a sacrifice! You're really a Zerbst! You hate me to that extent!?”

Kirche replied with a straight face.

“You're wrong, Louise. It's not 'hating,' but 'recognizing.' We probably can't win against the elf. The only thing possible, is your 'legend.'”

Louise's eyes bulged.

“You knew?”

“You're the only one who thought that we don't know. You chanted in front of us before, and those chants don't exist, do they?”

Louise blushed.

“I humbly apologize at my impoliteness towards the ancestor. Can you kindly lend your holy powers to this powerless servant?”

Kirche knelt down. As expected, Louise panicked. In the long history of the dispute between La Valliere and Von Zerbst, it was the first time a Von Zerbst

apologized.

“L-Lift up your head! What're you doing!? If I refuse this, am I not the bad guy!? I have already cast away my noble name! I'm just Louise the Zero! That's why even if I listen to what you say, I don't really mind,”

Turning aside, Louise said in an embarrassed voice.

“Eh? You threw aside your nobility?”

“That's right! I have returned my mantle and name to Her Majesty.”

“Aah! Well then, after saving Tabitha, come to Germania! I'll employ you as my maid!”

“Stop joking around!”

Somewhat overcome with emotion, Kirche hugged Louise tightly.

Saito looked at the two with a rather radiant expression. After that, to preserve his strength, he headed towards the bed.

He did not have any self-confidence at winning against the elf at all. Or rather, how should he fight to win?

The more he thought about it, the more anxious he became.

With his anxiety increasing, Saito felt as if being squashed.

But... friends with Kirche? When he looked at Louise who appeared to be trying to bring that up, he became embarrassed at that feeling.

“Well then, I'll follow what you said and sleep for a bit.”

“I look forward to it, Saito. Jean has always been saying. *Saito-kun is someone capable of changing this world.* I believe that as well. That's why; please change Tabitha's fate.”

Plucking up his courage, Saito grinned, overdoing it.

“Leave it to me!”

Saito slipped into the bed, and Sylphid who had been sleeping on it until now, opened her eyes wide.

“Kyui.”

“Oh, you're awake?”

Under her blue hair, Sylphid's blue eyes shone again.

“Thanks,” she expressed her gratitude.

“In order to save onee-sama, everyone is working hard for us. I'm very touched. If onee-sama knew that you all are coming to save her, she would surely be very happy.”

“...”

“Onee-sama doesn't speak much, so she may seem somewhat cold, but... in reality, she's a very kind person. I love onee-sama very much, but onee-sama doesn't lose to me- she loves me very much too. Although Onee-sama did not say anything, I know something like that.”

“Uh-huh...”

Sylphid noticed that Saito looked a little down.

“What's wrong?”

“No... I'm just a little envious of you guys.”

Although we are master and familiar, we can't understand each other at all.

Mutual feelings, yet we can't understand each other at all.

“You don't look well. Let me comfort you. But I dunno how to do it.”

“Kyui, kyui!” Whilst purring, Sylphid gave Saito a tight hug.

Whilst being tightly embraced by Sylphid's soft body, *Ah, will Louise turn this way to look at me?*, Saito thought vaguely.

If I were more imposing... she would look at me for a bit, won't she? He thought. *But, looks like that won't happen.*

Anyhow, at Tristain palace when we were captured, when I was trying to say that I love her..."Don't say it!" *She yelled at me, so...*

Of course I am wrong too.

Being spoony over Siesta, my heart throbbing when I see Henrietta's face. As for those, apart from keeping those charms to myself, I can't help it. This is a man's physiology.

But, I have been saying "I love you" to Louise all the time, haven't I?

Maybe... Louise has no space to fall in love, Saito thought.

Louise who is more serious than anyone else.

Louise who is always fixated on her ideals.

Saying "It's a reward!" *Kissing me, not being angry even when her breasts are touched, this means... it is not really because of her pride,* Saito changed his thoughts.

That's because, just like how this Sylphid does not know what's the best way to comfort this human me... she does not know what the best reward to give me, this teenager at puberty. Because she doesn't know how to express her gratitude.

And yet, every time I would misunderstand her... Saito wished he could just crawl into a hole. *Louise falling in love with me? Ha!*

I'm such a shameful person. Aah, SHAMEFUL!!

Ah, Louise.

The Louise who would return her mantle to Henrietta in order to stand for her ideals. More serious than anyone else, the noble Louise.

Maybe because you're like that, I have come to like you.

Among the people I encountered in the world I was born in, at least there isn't

someone who would stick completely to his “way of living” like Louise does. And then, in this world too...

Someday, when Louise is able to achieve her ideals, won't she start loving someone at that time? At that time, I want to be the one beside her, Saito thought.

To go along with Louise's ideals, I have to be much stronger. Elf or whatever, now's not the time to be frightened.

Displaying brute courage, Saito spread-eagled and closed his eyes. To measure up to Louise's ideals, he could not show his intimidation to anyone.

Looking at that strange Saito who spread-eagled on the bed while smiling, Louise's anxiety expanded all the more.

You were told that it's a fight against an elf, and yet, why aren't you afraid?

Why don't you hate it?

Aah, as I thought, Saito is given the courage as a familiar, huh?

Louise became deeply miserable.

The next day, in the evening...

Standing in front of the gates of Alhambra castle, a member of the Gallian army who was standing guard gave a big yawn. A soldier standing beside him chided him.

“Oi.”

“Hmm? Aah...”

“If you don't guard the door properly, we'd be scolded by the commanding officer!”

“Baron Misscoeur? That's all right! He's just an idiot.”

“No, it's not him. It's that un-human guy.”

The yawning soldier shook his head frantically as if his drowsiness was blown away.

“Oi, don't refer to him that lightly! Touch wood... O Founder Brimir. Please protect my soul...”

“I don't want to be eaten either! That's why I don't speak out his name...But dunno what the heck is wrong today... I went to the streets to eat during lunchtime, but wine was sold out!”

“Haa? What'cha mean?”

“Someone from somewhere had bought up all the wine in this inn town. B'cause of that, there wasn’t any wine no matter which bar I went to. What a joke!”

“That's the only pleasure in the center of this boring desert! Geez, which guy did such nonsense?”

As the conversation was going on, a cart could be seen coming from ahead on the road to the inn town.

“What's that?”

There were 7 male and female flashy street performers in the cart. The wagon behind was filled with barrels.

The cart stopped in front of the gate. Pointing their lances at them, the soldiers asked the group.

“Who are you guys?”

A redhead girl dressed in a dancer's costume with a high degree of exposure

bowed down elegantly.

“We are a group of street performers, sir.”

It was Kirche.

“I can see that. This is not some highway.”

“We know that.”

Sexily, Kirche threw a flirtatious glance at them. In an instant, the soldiers became as if entranced by succubus.

“We've come to provide entertainment.”

“Entertainment?”

The soldiers exchanged looks. After that, they realized what the content of those barrels stacked up behind was. One of them approached and sniffed the smell of the barrels.

“Isn't this wine!?”

Another glared at Kirche with a hateful look.

“The ones who bought up all the wine are you all!?”

“That's right.”

Kirche leaned coquettishly onto the soldiers. At Kirche's loveliness, the soldiers' expressions crumbled down pathetically.

“Please don't be angry, handsome misters. We are just doing our best at our living. We've come to tour Sahara, but those stingy elves didn't give us any money at all for our performances.”

“How would elves know what dancing is!?”

The soldiers broke out in laughter.

“Right? That's why we need customers who understand our art. Naturally, going

together with wine, right?”

“Got it! You guys didn't just come to buy wine huh? Planning anything funny?”

Those standing in the cart stiffened.

“And to sell dances as well while you're at this. Right?”

With a big smile on her face, Kirche said.

“Exactly! Our wine is slightly more expensive than the one in town, but we will provide dancing as a service. How about that?”

“What a nerve this lady has! I like it. I'll help you guys in your business!”

The soldier rushed off to report to his superior officer.

Turning back, Kirche combed her hair back triumphantly. At that brilliant skill, the entire group applauded.

Saito and the others were brought to see the ten nobles who commanded the units stationed in this castle. Apparently, the spare rooms at the right when one entered the castle hall were used by the officers.

The commanding officer was a forty-year-old-plus noble - Baron Misscoeur. He had seemingly taken a fancy with Kirche as soon as he saw her, and had allowed them to hold an exhibition.

“Germanian ladies are good at business, huh.”

Kirche put forth a price with the wine, and Baron Misscoeur smiled.

“We'll present the dance and the performance according to the price.”

Hmmm... Leaning out from his chair, he gazed at Kirche's body as if licking it. With his bald head, Baron Misscoeur caused a lewd atmosphere to hang about in the air.

“Very well. We'll pay the asking price. But, it is necessary to ascertain if you all are having something bad up your sleeves...We are after all, entrusted with valued troops from His Majesty...”

“If you don't believe us, I will present my personal dance.”

Saying that whilst casting a flirtatious glance, Baron Misscoeur's eyes narrowed.

“On the other hand, I have concerns that depriving the soldiers of their entertainment would be demoralizing. After the performance, come to my room. I'll personally investigate you.”

The nearby nobles displayed expressions of dissatisfaction.

“This is also the duty of the commanding officer! Ahaha!”

Facing the commanding officers who broke out in laughter, Kirche displayed a charming smile.

“Well then, we will make our preparations then.”

As Kirche was trying to leave the room, Baron Misscoeur called out to her.

“Before that, how about giving us a cup of the wine you brought?”

Montmorency paled. The sleeping potion she mixed was already mixed into the wine barrels. If the sleeping potion was discovered by him there, their plans would be ruined.

However, not disturbed, Kirche had a cask moved there and poured a glass.

The entire group held their breath.

“Enjoy.”

Baron Misscoeur brought the glass near his nose, and sniffed it. Montmorency was nervous to the extent of collapsing. The potion she mixed was tasteless and odorless, but Detect Magic would just do the trick.

Baron Misscoeur frowned, and shook his head.

The group froze like ice. Were they found out?

“This is some cheap stuff. Not befitting for the nobles. Give it all to the soldiers.”

Saying that, Baron Misscoeur emptied the wine in the glass onto the floor.

At Kirche who had excused herself from the officer's room, Saito whispered softly.

“Close shave...”

“That's only the beginning. The real thing is after this. But no elves were inside, huh.”

“What if none are here?”

“If that's the case, it'll be great...”

Kirche said in a not very hopeful tone.

Three hundred of the soldiers gathered in the courtyard of Alhambra Castle. Although the dance had not yet begun, the soldiers were quite excited already.

In this abandoned castle in the middle of the desert, being ordered with this senseless bodyguard duty, they were totally bored. Because dissatisfaction tantamount to rebellion was building up, almost everyone gathered. With only the minimum guards left behind, it was almost all of them.

The commanding officer, Baron Misscoeur was indignant inside that he shared this guarding duty with the elf. Just like most of the other Gallian nobles, he was contemptuous and dissatisfied with Joseph. Plainly speaking, he hated him.

The lieutenant proposed having the soldiers split in half, taking turns participating. But Baron Misscoeur shook his head.

“That 'king of impotence' drove me to such a situation. Once, the Misscoeur lineage was that of Gallia's prominent warriors. Bestowing me the duty of guarding madame duchess with the elf at such a rural area... He might've done it on a whim! Geez, who would be looking for that child and the old woman at such a time? Never mind, let all soldiers participate!”

Saying that, he thumped onto a luxurious chair he pulled out in the courtyard.

The instant both moons were shrouded by the clouds...

Holding torches, a thin lad and a plump youth appeared. Because the ones that appeared were guys, the soldiers began jeering and booing. The two threw the torches into the bonfire that was prepared beforehand.

After that, the two prepared musical instruments. The plump lad started hitting the drum. The thin and handsome one took out a flute and started playing it. Because it was an extremely horrible performance, the booings grew more intense.

Nevertheless, the instance female dancers appeared from the dark, the jeers stopped abruptly.

Altogether there were four female dancers.

The sexy, flame-haired girl was the leader. Illuminated by the flames, she was smiling sexily. Next was a golden-haired girl. She appeared embarrassed as she blushed.

After her was a pink-haired girl, who again appeared to be a child. The angrily stiffened face coloured.

The last one was a beautiful lady with long, blue hair. She was beaming all over with innocent smiles.

Enthusiastic applause, cheers and whistles could be heard from the soldiers.

The party had begun.

When Tabitha woke up... her mother was on the bed.

Holding the book with one hand, she lay down on the bed.

Beside her, her mother was snoring peacefully.

It looked like she had become sleepy and had fallen asleep whilst reading “The Hero of Ivaldi”.

Her mother's eyes opened slightly.

She thought her mother would start acting violent... but fixing her eyes on her, she did not move. *Could she have regained her sanity?* Joy spread out in her heart, as Tabitha called out to her mother.

“Mother.”

But still, her mother did not show any reaction. She merely stared fixedly at Tabitha. But, that was enough.

Looking at the doll on the mirror stand, Tabitha smiled a little.

“I will now read this book.”

Turning the page of the book, Tabitha started reading out loud.

Ivaldi arrived at the cave in which the dragon lived. His attendants and friends started freaking out at the entrance. One of the hunters told Ivaldi.

“Let's turn back. If the dragon wakes up, we will all die. 'Cause you don't know how scary the dragon is.”

Ivaldi said.

“I am afraid.”

“So act according to your feelings.”

“But if I lose to fear, I'll become someone besides me. That is many times scarier than being bitten to death by the dragon.”

Although Bidashal entered into the room, Tabitha did not lift her face from the book. Her mother was not startled by the elf's entrance either. Throughout those 20 days, every day, Tabitha had been reading to her mother “The Hero of Ivaldi”. If she read to her any other books, she would go mad like the olden days. That's why Tabitha had read the same book over and over again. She had read it out loud many times. That's why she had as good as memorized it by heart.

Seeing Tabitha reading a book, Bidashal displayed a small smile.

“Looks like you have taken a great fancy towards that book huh.”

Tabitha did not reply. Although Bidashal had entered now, unless there was anything special, she would not stop reading.

“Seems like a group of performers had come to comfort you. They are carrying out their performance at the courtyard. I have no interest whatsoever, but what about you? If you want to have a look, I will give you special permission to leave this room.”

Tabitha lifted her face and shook her head.

With a slightly stiffer voice, Bidashal told Tabitha.

“The medicine will be completed tomorrow.”

Tabitha's finger which was flipping the page stopped.

“You can only be yourself until tomorrow.”

Giving her special permission to leave this room... In other words, that would be the last mercy before the execution of her sentence.

“Boring entertainment, but it would at least console you a little bit.”

“Sympathy is not needed.”

Tabitha replied shortly.

I see.… Whispering that, Bidashal exited the room.

She wanted to at least spend her last few hours with her mother.

Tabitha laid her eyes on “The Hero of Ivaldi” again.

Ivaldi entered the dragon's cave. Nobody else accompanied him. With light from his torch, the moss-covered wall of the cave was illuminated. Being disturbed by the light, many bats flew about trying to escape.

Ivaldi became frightened and close to tears. He imagined that everyone had left him behind in that dark cave. How scary it was!

Moreover, a terrifying dragon laid ahead waiting for him!

But, Ivaldi did not waver.

Ivaldi had told himself many times.

“You can do this. Didn't you save many people already? This time you can do it as well. Did'ya hear that Ivaldi? You have power, so running away is cowardly.”

In those times she reread the book, Tabitha slowly felt the contradiction she had

towards the title when she was young, dispersing away.

“The Hero of Ivaldi”, what does it mean?

Ivaldi was not the name of a place- it was the name of the youth in the story. Usually, won't the title be published as “Ivaldi the Hero” instead?

When she was young, Tabitha once had that doubt in her mind.

But now she understood the meaning of the title.

The word “hero” is not referring to Ivaldi himself.

It is referring to the idea of the impulse or resolution in his heart.

When she was young... she would read and yearn for it.

In accordance with the “hero” living inside the Ivaldi-like hearts of the readers, they had longed to be the hero, but... she was different.

She was attracted by the lady captured by the dragon. She wanted to become the lady that was saved by the hero. Although it was fun, Tabitha had waited eagerly for the hero who would bring her out of the boredom of her daily life.

Comparing her life with the lady in the story, Tabitha smiled dryly in her heart.

Didn't I become this girl myself?

Now I have become someone imprisoned.

The only difference with the book is that, the hero who is to come to save me does not exist.

Now, or last time...'

But, that is good enough.

That's because I have been doing things alone all along.

Not relying on anyone, not trusting anyone, I have been doing everything on my own... because of that.

However... after reading this “Hero of Ivaldi”, she started imagining.

About the hero who would rescue her.

About the hero who would save her from this ominous cave, Alhambra Castle...

Because those were the final moments before she was to lose her heart, she might have been feeling such things obediently.

She felt love at her heart that would be lost after the following day. For the first time, Tabitha had felt love towards her heart that was covered by a snowstorm. She grasped her mother's hands tightly.

Tabitha started shivering slightly.

Chapter 10: The Hero of Ivaldi

Kirche's dance was beautiful, but Louise, Montmorency and Sylphid were hopelessly unskilled.

Matching a simple rhythm, Kirche made a melody with her dance. The other three behind her saw that and moved as if trying to mimic her, but they could not do it.

Nevertheless, to the soldiers who were craving for entertainment, it was good enough. That's because the dancing young girls' figures were only messily covered with cloth at the breasts and the waist.

The wine they brought was spent very quickly.

Shaking her sexy body, that red-haired girl was just like the incarnation of fire - shaking bewitchingly and passionately. The flashily swinging red hair was like a flaming torch.

On the other hand, the blonde and the pink-haired lady were merely shaking their waists rhythmically with her. But strangely, their movements were noble-like, and they possessed a high-class radiance as if that was a dance presented in the palace.

As for the blue-haired girl, initially, she could only sway about clumsily like a new-born fawn. However, in time, she got the hang of it, and started raging around happily.

Her wild presentation did not look like a dance no matter what, but watching her face brimming with joy brought happiness to those people.

The soldiers gulped and emptied the wine.

Inside, Baron Misscoeur left his seat. He did not touch the served wine, not even a drop.

Kirche saw Baron Misscoeur's soldiers head towards her. As if that was a signal, Kirche stopped her dance.

Worried, Louise whispered into Kirche's ear.

“That commanding officer didn't touch the wine. Is that okay?”

“I'll do something about it, so leave it to me. Umm, Montmorency. You prepared the sleeping potion so that it would work exactly after an hour right?”

“Yeap. But I think there might be slight differences between individuals...”

“So, 30 minutes from now, huh. Please deal with these soldiers appropriately. In 30 minutes time, I should have returned too.”

A soldier rushed up to Kirche and whispered a few words to her.

Smiling sweetly and nodding, she went after Baron Misscoeur who had disappeared.

The remaining members exchanged looks with one another.

“She said she was buying more time, but...”

The drunk audience started shouting unanimously.

“Hey!! The performance has ended!?”

“If so, come here, and pour us some wine!”

“I don't want to! Pouring wine for the soldiers!?”

Montmorency trembled all over with fear. She had been humiliated by dancing in front of commoners wearing such an embarrassing costume. If she had to serve them wine as well, she would probably no longer be able to take it.

“W-We'll dance! Quiet!”

Part two began. However, the dance team was without Kirche, and matching the horrendous music, they merely shook their waists roughly to the delicate rhythm. Because of that, the soldiers began to grow tired of it. Apparently, the huge success in the first part was due to Kirche's presence.

“What the heck is this!? Return our money!!”

Wine bottles and dishes flew towards them.

“Shit! Cocky soldiers!”

Poinkk! Being hit by wine bottles squarely at their heads, Guiche and Malicorne exploded in fury.

“W-Wait! If you get angry here our plans will be spoiled!”

Saito anxiously stopped them.

“What's wrong!? Since you're dancing, strip!”

“I can take off my clothes now?”

Kyui, kyui! Seemingly happy, Sylphid was about to strip off her clothes when it

was Louise who- *Pongg!* hit her at the head.

“Why did you hit me!?”

“Have some dignity! Dignity!”

“But I have no dignity in this form!”

Sylphid said, pointing at the dancer's costume that barely covered her breasts and waist.

“You have no choice!”

At their confusion, the soldiers booed them down.

“Oi, oi! So how!”

Saito coughed, and unsheathed Derflinger from his back. The soldiers became silent in an instant.

Malicorne and Guiche tried to stop him anxiously.

“Pl-Please stop! Don't be violent!”

But Saito...

“After this, I'll show my sword dance!”

...shouted desperately.

Under the attentive eyes of the silent soldiers, Saito swung Derflinger about.

“Cresent Moon Blow! Hoyaa!”

He jumped, and struck the ground.

“Jumping slash! Heeyaaa!”

The soldiers did not respond, but... in time, a roar started.

“Y-You're INSULTING us!?”

“We train with swords every day!!”

“Why must we watch you bastard's pathetic sword dance!?”

“Oops, we better go...”

The soldiers stood up and were going to leap at them. At that moment...

A gentle sound of flute could be heard.

“Eh?”

They turned around, and with a serious face, Guiche was blowing a flute. Malicorne started playing the drum seriously too. A very graceful melody.

“Waah, this… isn’t this court music?”

It looked like Guiche and Malicorne had begun a musical performance they were required to memorize as part of their fundamental education. Completely different from the previous music, it was a gentle tune.

Slowly, Montmorency started dancing in accordance to the tune. There wasn’t the furiousness Kirche’s dance had, but it was a movement that overflowed with grace and elegance.

Apparently, the combination of the bold costume and the elegant court dance had captured the soldiers’ hearts. Obediently, they started viewing the dance appreciatively. Saito held a sigh of relief.

Montmorency’s elegant dance continued for another twenty minutes.

While they were doing that, the effects of the sleeping potion started taking place. The soldiers started dozing off one by one. Under the moonlight, as if inviting the fairy of sleep, Montmorency continued dancing slowly.

Ten minutes were needed until every one of them fell asleep.

The sleeping potion Montmorency had mixed was a powerful one that would make the consumer fall asleep for a day.

The courtyard turned into a large bedroom. The sight of 300 soldiers and nobles

lying prostrate, asleep, was quite a magnificent one.

Saito and the others exchanged glances, and took out the wands hidden inside their musical instruments. After they finished equipping themselves, the party went to the castle tower of Alhambra. The crumbled, white castle reflected the moonlight and shone bewitchingly.

After this, we'll have to find Tabitha and her mother in this castle… and rescue them both.

Before that, we would probably have a showdown with the elf. Saito prayed that the elf wasn't there.

Just like an abandoned castle, here and there, parts of Alhambra Castle had collapsed. Ropes were tied across at dangerous places, as it was not possible to proceed any further. The interior was exactly like a maze.

Whilst pretending to be lost, Kirche investigated the castle interiors. But… Tabitha's figure could not be found. Because it would be bad if the sleeping potion were to take effect, Kirche halted her temporary search and headed towards the room of Baron Misscoeur, the one who lead the soldiers.

Entering the entrance hall facing the courtyard, she went up the stairs immediately. At the right of the passage upstairs there was a metal door that looked like it had been made recently. She used the knocker to hit the door, and with a sound of a key being turned, the door was opened.

"Oooh, I've been waiting! Come, come on in!"

Although Baron Misscoeur assumed a grim face in front of his soldiers and subordinates, he changed his looks and ushered Kirche in.

"Well then, I'll have to hold an examination. Nah, it has also been arranged by the king's order that I am to check every single person entering this castle. Yeap, every single one."

Baron Misscoeur stretched out his hands towards Kirche. But, Kirche gently brushed the hand away.

“You can examine me anytime, right?”

Whilst saying that, she sat on a bed beside a wall, facing him. Crossing her legs, she smiled.

“Hey, mister commanding officer. I’m a lady who's full of curiosity. So, I would like to ask something… is that okay?”

“What do you want to ask?”

Baron Misscoeur displayed a doubtful look.

“Are you protecting a super valuable diamond here?”

“Diamond? Ahaha! What a shame! The thing we are protecting here is just mother-and-child prisoners. What? You all came here to steal some non-existent diamond? Well then, I’ll have to carefully check you…”

Kirche avoided the hand which went about at her shoulders.

“I want to have a look at the prisoners. I am veeery interested in such things.”

“What an unusual woman. What would you do after seeing those people?”

Baron Misscoeur inserted his hand into the hem of Kirche’s dancing skirt.

“Hmm?”

He noticed the thing his fingertip touched.

Slowly grasping the thing and pulling it out, Baron Misscoeur looked at the thing he was holding, and cried out.

“You, a mage…”

Still smiling, Kirche snatched the wand from Baron Misscoeur’s hand, and shoved him away. She quickly recited a spell, and a huge fireball appeared at the tip of her wand.

That fireball was held at the nose of the baron who had fallen back. Having a fireball a few times bigger than his head placed in front of his nose, the baron held his face away in terror.

“Well then, shall you guide me to where the prisoners are?”

“…bastard, are you the Duke of Orléans? A spirit which doesn’t exist in reality?”

“Nope. I am just a thief. For your information, I am short-tempered. If you don’t want every hair on you head to be burned to ashes, take me there quickly.”

Baron Misscoeur trembled.

“No way. I can’t do that.”

“Whhhhy?”

“He is there. I will be killed by him.”

Kirche’s raised her eyebrows.

“He? You mean the elf?”

“Th-That’s right. Forgive me! If it’s money I’ll pay. That’s why…”

From the other side of the door a high-pitched, clear voice could be heard.

“What’s with the money?”

Hiiiiiiiiiii! Baron Misscoeur let out a shriek.

“Lord Bi-Bidashal!”

The door opened, and the figure of a tall man covered in a foreign robe appeared.

After casting a glance at Kirche, without paying the slightest attention at the fireball at the tip of her wand, that man asked in a dubious voice.

“Who are you?”

Kirche’s reply was the fireball. Released from the tip of her wand, the fireball swelled up, as if swallowing the thin elf. However, Bidashal did not even try to avoid it.

'The fireball burned the elf up in an instant'… the instant she thought that, in front of her eyes, it changed its target and turned 180 degrees.

“Wh-!!”

A shriek of shock leaked out of Kirche's mouth.

While Saito and the others were rushing up the stairs leading from the courtyard to the entrance of the castle tower… the wall of a certain section of the castle tower exploded suddenly.

“What was that!?”

Guiche shouted.

Next, the figure of someone dropping from the center could be seen.

“Isn’t that Kirche!?”

Together with the broken pieces of the wall, Kirche slammed onto the ground. They rushed to the collapsed Kirche.

“Such bad wounds!”

Montmorency started chanting a Water spell hastily. Sylphid transformed herself too, and started casting recovery magic at the same time.

“Elf… be careful…”

Saying that, Kirche fainted. It was quite a huge damage.

“Guiche, Montmorency. We’ll leave Kirche to you.”

“G-Got it.”

Saito broke out in a run. Louise chased after him.

“Wait! Wait for me!”

“What is it!?”

Saito screamed out in fury.

“Your opponent is an elf! If we don’t proceed carefully…”

“There’s no time to do that! Kirche is already injured! If we don’t hurry, Tabitha could be in danger!”

Louise raised her voice too.

“You’re in danger too, aren’t you!”

“…Louise?”

Dumbstruck, Saito stared at Louise. Whilst catching her breath, Louise shook her head.

“I am scared of your courage… scared of your courage that causes you to plunge towards 70,000 enemies and not be afraid of the elf…”

“What do you mean!?”

“Your courage… Isn’t that a fake courage you were given as Gandálfr? If you’re afraid, then you can’t protect your master – that courage which acts on its own.”

“Haaa?”

“I cannot allow it. The contract I gave you has turned you into someone unlike you. So please… don’t show that courage to me.”

With eyes brimming with tears, Louise looked up at Saito.

Saito muttered in a tired voice.

“…if that’s the case, okay.”

“…eh?”

“I actually don’t have any such courage. I am ashamed to say it, but to be frank, I've been trembling fearfully for a while now. Trembling with excitement? Quit joking. I am shivering in fear.”

“Saito…”

“Even during the time I plunged towards the 70,000, I was afraid I was going to die. I was so scared I froze all over and did not move. I forced myself to lift my legs off the ground, and to move forward. That is the courage of Gandálfr? Don’t talk nonsense. If anything happens, I’ll tremble all over in fear like this.”

“So, so why…?”

“I cannot show such a pathetic appearance, can I!? To start with, I’m a guy right!? Just like that, because of some twist of fate I was born a male! That’s why I cannot act foolishly, and have to show a good appearance! Besides, I’m Gandálfr. I’m not ordinary, and I have received powers. All the more, I can’t escape! Because it’s me, I can probably do it. That's why there’s no way I can escape!”

Tears overflowed from Louise’s eyes. Whilst weeping, Louise hit Saito.

“Why are you hitting me!”

“I misunderstooooooddddd~~~~!”

Saito was perplexed by Louise who was angry at him. But now was not the time to be puzzled or go against her.

“Okay now, just prepare your spell.”

Being told that, Louise nodded. With his right hand, Saito grasped the handle of Derflinger he was carrying at his back. The runes on his left hand shone. He gently hugged Louise with that left hand.

“Hmm, actually.”

“Hm?”

“It was written on my report card that I was the kind of person that tends to just go with the flow. This is who I am, so up till now, no matter how much I heard about magic or legends or even Gandálfr, I just didn't feel surprised at all.”

Louise frowned a little.

“…which one is it? Your courage. Is it a real thing? Is it really Gandálfr’s after all?”

“Surely, once I hear your Void spell, my heart would jump, and my fear would disappear a little. But the effect of being Gandálfr was only something like that. Apart from that… it is my very own courage which flows easily.”

Whilst letting her tears fall, Louise gripped Saito’s sleeve. *So, Saito’s “love” is also…*

Nevertheless, now was not the time to be immersed in sweet feelings,

At the next instant, from the castle tower, a few fireballs flew towards them.

Saito held out his sword. The small fireballs were absorbed by Derflinger and were extinguished. As if repelling them, Saito charged forward, ran up the staircase and slashed the pillar of the entrance hall.

The pillar was cut into two, and Lord Bidashal who was standing behind it, appeared.

“Hi!”

Without even giving him the time to recite spells, Saito drove the handle of the sword towards his stomach. Lord Bidashal fell back onto the bed.

Whilst poking at the fallen Baron Bidashal with his leg,

“This guy is an elf?”

He asked Louise.

“No. You know it too, right? Elves have pointed ears…”

From the top of the stairways leading to the second floor, a human figure appeared.

A voice like the clear sound of a glass bell could be heard.

“You all are friends of the girl just now?”

Seeing that silhouette, Louise said.

“Just like him.”

From the wide staircase, the elf descended slowly. Derflinger which was being grasped tightly, said in a sad voice.

“Elf… nothing we can do now. For our safety, we’d better pull back here.”

“If we pull back we can’t save Tabitha.”

Step by step, the elf came down from the stairs.

“I am Bidashal the elf. Let me inform all of you.”

Using the word “elf” in his self-introduction, was he trying to play on the fears of Saito and the rest?

That was an unnecessary move.

Even if he didn’t do that, there was a power of limitless intensity in that peaceful voice. Different from the enemies they had encountered so far, a hidden terror; that's what Saito felt.

“Wh-What is it!?”

“Leave. I do not like battles.”

“If so, return Tabitha!”

“Tabitha? Ah, that mother and daughter, eh? That is impossible. “*Guard them here.*” I have unfortunately made such a promise. I cannot hand them over.”

“If so, we’ve got no other choice. There’s no way but to fight.”

This guy is strong. The battle experiences he had until now taught him thus. The instinct he had as a living being started warning him about the creature in front of him, who surpassed him.

But still, Saito gripped his sword.

Grasping his sword, he looked forward.

However, his legs did not obey him.

Whenever the elf took a step forward, Saito took a step backward. He was then reminded of the words Agnes taught him.

“Look for openings.”

No matter how much he looked, his opponent was full of openings. Wherever he swung his sword, that should be a hit.

Why is he that defenseless?

"Partner, it’s useless. Stop it.”

Derflinger said in a slightly impatient tone.

And yet… Saito readied his sword and rushed forward.

“Ooo, Wooooooo!”

A voice close to desperation. He dashed forward with his shivering legs. Jumping in front of Bidashal, he swung the sword downwards… but,

Buuwahh

The air in front of Bidashal distorted.

As if he was swinging a lump of rubber, the sword was repelled backwards. Just like jumping on a trampoline, Saito was blown backwards.

Saito rolled down to the entrance hall in front of the courtyard.

The elf stopped halfway at the stairs, and looked down at Saito.

“Leave, you barbaric fighter. You cannot win against me.”

Louise rushed up to Saito who had collapsed.

“Saito!”

Ouuuuuuuccchhhh! Saito stood up. Having struck the stone marble floor, his body did not move for a while. Although he was Gandálfr, his body was still of living flesh and blood. However nimble he might have been, the damage he received was still there.

“What kind of person is he… it was as if there was a wall of air in front of his body… What happened?”

Derflinger muttered in a bitter voice.

“That is 'Counter.' Just like the elves who hate fighting… What a troublesome magic…”

“Counter?”

“Repelling all attacks and magics –a strong Ancient Magic. Looks like that elf had made a contract with the 'power of the spirits' in this castle. What an elf. What an amazing 'user' this guy is…”

“Ancient Magic? THAT of the Water Spirit?”

“Remember, partner. This is the 'Ancient Magic.' Until now, all the enemies were but trying to imitate it. Not even Brimir himself could win against the elves’ Ancient Magic. Alright kid, the real show has only just begun.... Well then, what should we do?”

“Don’t play with me! If we cannot use swords or magic, what should we do!?”

Bidashal lifted both his hands.

“O power of spirits hidden within these stones, with the ancient covenant I command you. Turn into pebbles and strike these enemies of mine!”

Around Bidashal, the huge rocks which formed the stairs rumbled and started

rising up.

The pieces of rocks exploded in mid-air, attacking Louise and Saito.

Saito tried to fend off the countless assailing stones that were like scattered gunshots. However, there were too many of them and those that were not fended off hit his body.

Saito shielded Louise in front of her, and stopped those with his body.

One of them struck Saito at his forehead, and blood started trickling. For one moment he almost lost consciousness… but Saito still endured it.

Louise supported Saito who seemed to be falling down.

“Hey Derflinger! What should we do? What on earth should we do!?”

“There is no other way. Only your element can do something to this guy, someway or another. You’re the one who has to act, Louise.”

“But, no magic can work! What in earth should I recite? Ah, I left Founder Brimir’s prayer book at the academy, so now I can’t do anything, can I!? I can read it when I can? What is that! Why can't it be available anytime anyway!”

“You have mastered that spell long ago.”

“Eh?”

“Dispel. There is nothing else which can nullify Ancient Magic apart from 'Dispel.'”

“Oh yeah, Dispel!”

“But still, looks like that elf has made all the powers of the spirits in this place into his allies. To nullify all of that is something big. Can you gather enough willpower to cast such a Dispel?”

Louise was taken aback. But… she could not run away.

That’s because Saito was standing in front of her, wielding his sword.

Besides not admitting the defeat of her familiar, as a master, she should not admit her own defeat.

No… it was something simpler. That's because there was no way she could abandon the guy who was so attracted to her.

Attracted to me, that's possible huh? Louise reflected back upon it. She was astonished at herself for still having the time for such things.

Maybe I can.

Louise readied her wand.

Because the mage and the warrior guarding her still hadn't left, the elf looked a little angry.

"You savage. Stop this useless resistance. I already have a contract with these stones which form this castle. Every spiritual power residing within these walls is my ally. Both of you will never win."

Saito bared his teeth and roared.

"…shaddap you long-eared fool! Who's the savage here!? I hate those people most who like you, think they are so great!"

Bidashal shook his head, and lifted up both his hands again. Then, the rocks of the wall were ripped out, and they turned into a gigantic fist.

"Wh-What is that!?"

A fearful voice escaped through Louise's mouth.

No matter how great a mage is, there is no way he can make an enormous rock fist whilst reciting such a strong defensive spell.

Staring at the rock that had formed like clay, Saito trembled all over.

"So that is the 'Ancient Magic' of the elves…"

The gigantic rock fist aimed and flew towards Saito and Louise.

In the living room, reading the book out loud, Tabitha’s ears caught a loud sound of explosion.

After that, silence ensued for a while, but… this time she could hear the soft noise of something cracking off.

Her mother cringed in her bed, afraid.

Tabitha gently embraced her mother. *What on earth has happened?*

“It’s all right,” she whispered to her mother. Getting down from the bed, she went to the door to check things out.

But… the door was shut with the 'Lock' spell. Deprived of her wand, she could not do anything. Once feared by others, now the Knight of the North Parterre, Chevalier Charlotte, was nowhere to be seen. The one who was there was only Charlotte Hélène d'Orléans, imprisoned and utterly helpless. Even if she wanted to check what was happening outside, she could not even do that.

Tabitha returned to the bed.

Her frightened mother stared fixedly at the “Hero of Ivaldi.”

Tabitha picked up the book, and started reading it, like she had done for many a time.

Whilst reading the book, Tabitha thought,

What if… someone has come to save me?

Sylphid’s face floated in her mind.

Kirche’s face came into her mind.

I hope it’s not them, Tabitha thought. That elf is probably no match for anyone.

Finally, Saito's face came into her mind.

The young man...who professed himself to be the legendary familiar.

The sword user who defeated me.

Saito who had defeated me, a Chevalier, with a sword. If it's him… what if it is him who has come here to rescue me?

But… she shook her head.

Such miracle would never happen.

Someone who can win against that elf does not exist.

Any hope will lead to despair. Hasn't that been the case all this while?

That's right, there had never been a time when my anticipation was rewarded.

Tomorrow I'll lose my soul. This fate will not change.

Slowly, Tabitha started reading the book again.

Ivaldi confronted the dragon inside the cave. The scales of the dragon which had been living for thousands of years were glittering like golden bars, and had turned very hard.

The dragon said to Ivaldi who was shivering in fear whilst holding his sword.

"What a small being. Get lost. This is not a place you should come."

"Return Roux!"

"That girl is your wife?"

"No."

“What kind of relationship do you have with her?”

“Nothing. I had only stopped by at the village to have some bread.”

“You throw your life away just for that?”

While trembling all over from fear, Ivaldi proclaimed,

“For that I have gambled my life!”

Louise and Saito were blown off by that rock fist into the courtyard. Their friends who were looking after Kirche ran up to them.

“Saito! Louise!”

Using his body as a shield for Louise, Saito, who had received the blow of the rock fist with Derflinger, had broken his right arm.

Montmorency started reciting recovery spells at his arm.

In an anguished voice, Saito said.

“Run. We will do something.”

“That’s enough, just keep quiet!”

Malicorne chanted a wind spell, and dispersed the incoming pebbles.

Reciting an Earth spell, Guiche made a huge wall in front of them.

Nevertheless, the elf’s magic was too powerful.

Standing at the top of the stairs leading to the courtyard, Bidashal easily pulverized the wall Guiche made, and fired the stone pebbles as if Malicorne’s magic was nothing.

Saito stood up, and hit the pebbles away with Derflinger.

“I haven’t healed your right arm yet!”

Montmorency shouted angrily.

“No time for that!”

“But…”

“Louise is reciting her spell.”

The entire party turned back.

Without anyone noticing, Louise had stood up, readied her wand, and was already chanting her spell clearly.

...Ûruz Thurisaz Ansur Cen …

Louise squeezed those words from within her mouth.

Gyfu Nyd Nauthiz…

The willpower and energy within her mind transformed their essence, as they finally turned into words that could change the rules of the universe, and flowed out of Louise's body.

Louise was amazed at the willpower that was dormant within her.

Her willpower, something she had been amassing in herself for the past sixteen years, had changed into "Explosion" and annihilated the big armada that assailed Tristain. And now, the sensation that was forming in her mind...was the same as that time.

Why?

Eihwaz Yara…

Why?

Louise asked herself.

Why did she have such willpower within herself?

Where did she acquire the willpower to enable her to chant such a long “Void” spell?

Willpower is the strength of the heart.

Louise had known that anger or happiness would multiply the power of magic. The strength of the spell is not determined by one’s talent alone.

Anger? Happiness? Sadness?

Then she thought of a feeling which was neither of those.

The question that was born from within Louise brought forth a hypothesis.

The only feeling swelling so expansively within Louise…

Is that the source of Void?

Yr Eoh Is!

The spell had been completed.

Derflinger yelled.

“Cast that 'Dispel' on me!”

Louise pointed her wand at Derflinger and swung it down.

The “Void Spell” enshrouded Derflinger, and the blade shone brightly.

“Partner! Now!”

Saito targeted Bidashal at the top of the stairs and rushed forward.

Raising Derflinger over his head, he swung it down.

It clashed with the invisible barrier, “Counter.”

But this time he was not repelled backwards.

The “Void” Louise recited concentrated at one point of the barrier… dispelling the section that came into contact with Derflinger.

Just like slicing a sticky fruit into half, it slowly sliced the “Counter” barrier apart.

It was merely an instant.

Breaking the barrier apart, the spiritual power protecting Bidashal scattered.

The tall elf was shocked.

“Shaitan… so this the power that polluted the world!”

No match for them, the elf merely looked on and grasped his left hand with his right one. The “Wind Stone” sealed inside the ring started functioning. Like a puppet pulled by threads, Bidashal rose to the sky.

“Descendants of Shaitan! I warn you! Never approach Shaitan’s Gate! Should that happen, we will surely destroy you all!”

While looking at the elf who gradually disappeared into the sky, Saito slowly collapsed on the ground. That was because he felt relieved and thus let himself loose.

Three hundred soldiers behind them were sleeping.

In front of them, countless rubble rolled about.

Having used up her willpower, Louise fell to the ground and started snoring.

Guiche whispered excitedly.

“I actually won against an elf. Unbelievable.”

“Didn’t you just lose?” Montmorency said.

Saito carried Louise up.

“Okay, let’s go. Our job’s not done yet.”

“Where to?”

In a stupid voice, Malicorne asked.

“To find Tabitha!”

Carrying Louise in his arms, Saito started climbing the stairs leading from the courtyard to the castle tower.

Kirche woke up. She was being carried by Malicorne and Sylphid. She smelt the burnt smell of her scorched hair. *My hair has become curly,* she thought absent-mindedly. *The burns on my skin are not so bad. Maybe that was due to Montmorency's Water magic.*

Oh my, I've never thought that I would be showered by my own fire.

What's wrong with the elf? The figures of Saito walking in front, and Louise being carried by him, came into her sight. *Looks like they have somehow dealt with the elf.*

In the history of our families, I have become the first Von Zerbst to thank La Vallière. While thinking that, Kirche lost consciousness again.

Ivaldi struck the dragon with his sword, but he was stopped by the hard scales and was forced back. The dragon used its claws, huge jaw and spouted flames to injure him.

Ivaldi fell many times, but he got up each time.

When the dragon delivered the final blow by spouting his flames, something astonishing occurred. The sword Ivaldi was holding shone brightly, and repelled the dragon's flames. Ivaldi then sprung up, and drove his sword through the dragon's throat.

Dummm! With a sound, the dragon collapsed to the ground.

Ivaldi headed towards the room behind the dragon.

Roux was hugging her knees and trembling in fear.

"It's all right now."

Ivaldi extended his hand.

“The dragon is dead. You are free now.”

Finishing reading the book at that line, Tabitha’s glance rested on her mother. She was snoring peacefully. The terrible sounds just now had stopped without her noticing.

At the other side of the door, footsteps could be heard.

They were different from those of the elf or the soldiers.

Why? Tabitha’s heart asked.

Hope expanded within her heart.

Tabitha tried to deny that.

That’s because it is impossible.

Impossible.

No one would come to the country border between Gallia and the elves to rescue her. But still, as a user of Wind element, Tabitha’s refined ears kept telling her that those footsteps were familiar. An unusual pair of shoes. The unseen, soft-sounding shoes.

She heard the sound of someone trying to open the door.

Realizing that it was locked, *Bang!* The door was cut apart.

The instant the face of the one she saw when she rushed out of the Academy; the black-haired person, came into sight… Tabitha broke down. The dear feelings, the emotion which she had forgotten, swept over her.

It was relief.

The ones who entered after Saito were Guiche and Malicorne. Louise was carried by Saito on his shoulder. Montmorency and Sylphid, who had metamorphosized into a human, were together with them as well. Carried by Sylphid, Kirche had come too.

“Onee-sama! You’re all right! Kyui!”

“Oh, thank God, thank God! You’re here!”

Guiche and Malicorne wore smile on their faces too. Kirche was unconscious due to her injuries. *Surely she had fought for my sake.*

In a daze, Tabitha looked up at them.

I thought I had been fighting alone all this while.

However, I am not alone.

I’m not alone.

Carrying Louise on his back, Saito approached her, and extended his hand to her.

“You all right? Are you hurt?”

Tabitha felt something warm trailing down her face.

Tabitha wept like a child.

The forgotten tears of relief flowed down.

Whilst shedding tears, Tabitha thought to herself.

Maybe I have been searching.

In the midst of my independent, solitary fights, within my already frozen heart, all this while, maybe I have been searching.

From the imprisoned place.

From the depths of my cold heart.

For the Ivaldi who would come to save me.

Epilogue

Taking a wagon from within Alhambra Castle, the group traveled on the streets in the dead of the night.

They could not use Sylphid – it was impossible for eight people to ride on her body that had yet to recover. Even if she were healthy, she could not carry eight people and fly for an hour. There was no other way, since Sylphid was still a young dragon.

The plan was to enter Germania temporarily after traveling two days by coach, then cross Zerbst's territory to enter Tristain.

The ones at the coachman's seat, taking care of the bridles, were Guiche and Malicorne. Looking ahead, they were chatting in voices mixed with fatigue and excitement.

"Hey Guiche."

"What is it?"

"If you think about it carefully, we have just done something terrible huh?"

"Uh-huh. We've done it this time."

"Wonder what my father and mother would be thinking at home. When I said I wanted to serve the Imperial Guards, they were so happy… And now we're going back as criminals. It'll probably cause a huge trouble. Huh, I'll really trouble them now. Geez."

"Are you regretting your actions?" Guiche asked.

"Frankly speaking, a little. But I'd be more regretful if I hadn't gone along, I think. Constantly harassed by our female classmates. If I hadn't helped you at all, I would have become not a noble, but a commoner instead."

Malicorne said, sighing.

“If that’s so, then don’t regret it.”

Guiche clapped Malicorne’s shoulders.

“You’re a good guy! One of these days you’ll get a lover. I guarantee it.”

“Even if Guiche guarantees it, I’m still not happy.”

Poking her head out from the carriage into the space between the two, Montmorency sighed.

“Huh, why did I follow you all until here… If I think about it, ain’t I at the frontier of Halkeginia?”

“Hahaha!”

Montmorency glared at Guiche who had laughed optimistically.

“What are you laughing at! I’m asking what we should do when we go back to Tristain!”

“I’m not thinking about that. When it comes, it comes.”

“Haa?”

“Shouldn’t we think about going back to our country first? Although it’s good that we rescued Tabitha, it doesn’t guarantee a safe return right? Not just the Gallian army. Seems like the elves are those guys’ allies too.”

“Huh…”

Montmorency let out a huge sigh. Guiche put his arm around her shoulders.

“Don’t worry, my Montmorency. I’ll give my life to protect you.”

“Why did I get the short end of the stick?”

“It’s okay! For some reason, my luck is strong! We’ll manage it this time too!”

“It’s not that. I’m saying that my choosing you is in itself a mistake.”

Glaring steadily at Guiche, Montmorency said that.

“H-How could this be…”

Guiche was dumbfounded. Montmorency planted a kiss at his face.

“Eh?”

“Why that miserable look?

“Monmo…”

At Guiche who looked up with feverish eyes, Montmorency declared.

“Geez. Don’t give up. We’ll make it somehow! 'Cause I’m really not going to jail!”

Inside the wagon that was covered with a cloth, wrapped in straw, Kirche and the mother and child were snoring gently. Tabitha’s mother was asleep due to Montmorency’s potion. That’s because she would struggle violently when awake. Cuddling her mother closely, Tabitha was sleeping. She had certainly gone through much.

Covered in bandages, Kirche was sleeping too. Her burns were recovering due to Montmorency’s water magic, but… She had used up a lot of her strength.

Sylphid was sleeping in between Kirche and Tabitha.

The ones still awake in the wagon were Saito and Louise.

Looking at the sleeping Tabitha, Saito said,

“Hey Louise.”

“What?”

“I wonder how Tabitha felt, huh… Fighting alone all along like that… No matter how I think about it, looks like I’m more blessed. The ones who would help their friends, that’s really like you… But, this girl has always been alone.”

“Yeah.”

“As I thought, although we have gone against Her Majesty and Agnes to that extent, I think it’s good that we left.”

Saito said so earnestly. Louise nodded too.

“What are you going to do once we go back to Tristain, Louise? First we’ll rescue teacher, is there anywhere for us to hide?”

“What are you talking about?”

Louise glared at Saito.

“Eh?”

“Go to the palace openly and receive our verdict. What we have just done may not be wrong. But that does not change the fact that we have brought trouble upon the Princess and our motherland. We are lawbreakers. We have no choice but to receive our punishment.”

“That’s right. Uh-huh.”

Saito nodded, tired. *How long would I be jailed? But still, I have no regrets. I think I would be more remorseful if I hadn’t done this.*

Seeing Saito acting in that way, Louise said in an angry-like voice;

“No. Only I have to go into jail.”

“Ehh?”

“Just say that I, Her Majesty’s court lady, had incited you guys, the Imperial Guards into action.”

“Wh-What!? Don’t joke around! I brought everyone along! It’s my fault!”

But, Louise was no longer looking at Saito. Gazing straight ahead, her mouth was tight shut, and a determined look hung on her face.

Despite wearing the dancer's costume, Louise's nobility was not damaged one bit. Instead, that lowly costume caused Louise's demeanor as a noble to stand out.

Saito reminisced the time when he met Louise. The time when he was almost stepped on by the golem, Louise who said, *"A mage who abandons his familiar is not a mage!"* Louise had not changed since then. The girl who never neglected the "pride" within her…

Hiding such thoughts within her heart, Louise was divinely beautiful. *I grew to like her because she's like that.* Saito thought.

"Louise… I… You are really great. Umm…"

Saito reached out for Louise's left hand nervously. But that hand avoided him.

"Don't touch me."

"D-Don't be angry!"

Nervous, Saito's hands reached out for Louise's shoulders.

"Didn't I say not to touch me!?"

Louise's face swelled, and she turned away. Those cheeks turned red. The third time he hugged her shoulders, she did not brush it away. She pursed her lips in an annoyed look, her body stiffening.

Simply speaking, Louise at that state was intensely cute. Saito could not help but to press his lips closer.

"No."

Louise resisted.

"Th-That's right! Kissing is a reward. Since I haven't received anything like a reward. But, I still like to do this. Very much."

Saito said impatiently, and *nyah~~~~~~* displayed an extra large smile. It was an utmost evil smile.

As I thought… such pathetic face is not something he acquired as Gandálfr. Just like what Saito said just now, courage, love… These are surely born from within him…

When she thought about that, relief and a sense of mastery gushed forth in unison. *Of course, this fellow is still my servant, right. How do I say it –the worshiper of love, right.*

And yet I had worried about it and became miserable. My injured pride demands a restoration of honor. Louise stood up and folded her arms.

With an absolutely triumphant voice, she looked down at Saito.

“Ehhhhhhhhhh? You, what did you say you want to do with me?”

“…Ki-kiss.”

“I can’t hear you!”

Combing her hair back in an exaggerated action, Louise declared that haughtily.

“I said I would like to ki-kiss you.”

Saito was already kneeling and speaking politely. Grasping his fists tightly above his knees, he was trembling all over, somewhat regretfully. *I can’t help it. The moment I said I wanted to kiss her, I had already lost.*

“You really want it? Say it please. How much do you want it?”

“V-Very much.”

“Very much? Don’t be that abstract! You want to kiss me right? This is the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard. So this beast says with a straight face that he wants to kiss his master. How touching.”

"I-I am not a beast.”

Saito had already started using "mon[1]". That’s a result of his expanding

humility due to his wanting to wholeheartedly kiss Louise.

“You’re not a beast?”

Louise raised her eyebrows.

Kirche, the maid, Jessica, pseudo-breasts, the Princess. Various incidences of her pride being bruised were brought back to her like a kaleidoscope that changed its shape.

Her anger towards those memories had finally made Louise wake up.

Louise started putting on her miraculous impish manner. She did not learn it from anyone. Probably, that was because some part of Louise was asleep. Until now, it had only lain dormant without coming out to the surface. While watching Saito's reaction, Louise started manipulating that imp of hers that had formerly come out only unconsciously.

Smiling, Louise first stood with her arms akimbo. Because of only that pose, Saito almost died.

Not satisfied with that, Louise raised one of her legs, and placed it against the wall. Her dancer costume's loincloth was lifted up, and her thighs which drew Louise's delicate lines were burned into Saito's eyes.

At the same time, she cast a flirtatious, sneering glance at him.

Breathing had already become difficult for Saito.

In a singing-like voice, Louise said to Saito.

"So, what did you say you want to do to me? What did'ya say? Use that funny mouth of yours. With unique, helpless words which can make me laugh. Together with that sickening dog-look, say that word!"

"Ki-Kiss…"

"Well then, praise me."

With an increasingly triumphant attitude, Louise said further.

"…Eh?"

"Praise me until I'm happy. Oh yeah, firstly, that maid. Give me 100 parts of me that are better than Siesta. If not, I won't let you do anything."

Saito was confused, but he still continued.

"Y-You're… Which parts are better errr… You have good points; Siesta has good points too… As a rule…"

“What is this!?”

“Looks like this child didn’t hear it properly. I said to praise me. Praise your master, your ruler, your god! Can’t you hear? Feel like dying, are you?”

At the height of this chaos, the taboo came out of Saito’s mouth.

“Umm… Louise… yeah! Your breasts!”

“You’re making fun of me?”

Louise’s lips distorted into something evil. She put strength into her stamping foot. *Ouuuuuu* A groan escaped Saito’s mouth.

At that instant…

The sound of someone coughing could be heard.

Louise turned back, and saw that Guiche, Montmorency and Malicorne were staring at them from the coachman’s seat.

Being delirious, she had completely forgotten their existence. Louise’s face turned crimson. Because Saito was beginning a journey in his dream, he did not realize anything.

“Errr… Louise. If you don’t finish it, your name will be…”

Guiche said that with a troubled face.

“Stupid. If you’re bored, p-please practice your drama! Isn’t that so, Saito?”

However, Saito could not reply because he had already fainted. Louise cheerfully lifted Saito up, and just like how Siesta did last time, turned him around.

“Hey. Saito here. Just now was the practice of our play.”

Whilst shaking their heads, Guiche and the others looked to the front. Sighing, Malicorne hit the horse with his bridle.

The coach they were in sped up.

Anxiety, joy, hope, and then pride and self-respect... Fully loaded with various feelings, the coach headed towards the country border of Germania, dashing across the streets under the moonlight of the twin moons.

Tabitha was dreaming.

At the dear Orléans mansion at the lakeside of Ragdorian Lake... There was a table at the center, and her gentle parents were having some snacks whilst chatting pleasantly.

Being watched over by both of them, the doll her mother bought for her... With “Tabitha”, the doll which could not be said to be very beautiful, beside her, she was reading a book. She was reading out “The Hero of Ivaldi” in a clear voice, a book which she had read for many times. A cheerful voice that she no longer had, was flowing out of her.

Those gentle times that had disappeared at the other side of timeline - they were right there.

Within the dream, Tabitha realized that she was in dreamland. That's because her father who was smiling so warmly, had already passed away.

Percerin , the butler, appeared.

“Your Highness, the guests have arrived,” he informed them. *Please show them here*, her mother said. *Charlotte's friends? That's quite rare,* her father said with a smile.

Her academy friends' faces showed up at the courtyard.

With bunches of flowers in their hands, Guiche and Malicorne came forth. Montmorency was with them too.

With a somewhat embarrassed face, Louise handed Tabitha a paper bag. There

were many sweets inside.

With her dazzlingly red hair, Kirche showed up. Smiling sweetly, she hugged Tabitha. Embraced by her close friend, Tabitha was touched without a reason. A friend's warmth is the hardest to substitute. Tabitha felt as if her frozen heart was melting.

Another close friend descended from the sky, and licked Tabitha.

“You have informed us, right?”

Kyui, Sylphid happily purred. Tabitha gently patted the chin of her faithful familiar. Sylphid squinted her eyes.

The last one to show up was Saito.

Carrying a sword at his back, he approached Tabitha slowly, and bowed.

“Sorry, I'm late.”

Tabitha smiled shyly and turned away.

“The Hero of Ivaldi” she was carrying slipped from her hands.

Is it because I've found my hero?

In that immensely gentle, warm dream, Tabitha thought that.

Postscript

Yamaguchi here. Finally, the tenth book of Zero no Tsukaima. How great is that!

Not just in anime, but in games and manga, it has spread in various ways in the world. I have been having this feeling of my work leaving my hands.

I have seen many fan arts at the Net too. I feel it spreading, and it feels good. Similar to the universe, expansion is a good thing. Seemingly expanding like a bubble-shaped universe. Great Wall? Nah. An awesome universe.

The theme of the 10th book is “hero”. Who is “hero” this word referring to? During my younger days, I thought of it as in games -Warriors wield swords; magi cast magic; priests heal injuries; bandits are quick- These easy-to-understand characters came into my mind, but a hero is neither. They have to wield swords, have to use magic……So it is referring to people who do what?

I thought ‘hero’ refers to the one who saves the world, but the warrior, priest, and magician –aren’t they part of the party which saves the world?

I thought about this. “Hero” is the player himself, and because of his fame, he’s a hero. That’s because I have been pondering alone, playing games. However, I came to a sudden realization lately.

A “hero” refers to someone fortunate who is placed in a situation in which he can display his valor.

That is not his occupation, but it is also not referring to someone brave. That's because there is no man on earth who does not possess courage.

It cannot be helped, since that depends on each individual's interpretation. Generally, the moment a person is chosen by God was a hero, his journey as one begins.

In short, a “hero” is not the act of “becoming one”, but the act of

“unintentionally becoming one”, or “unintentionally chosen as one”.

Chosen randomly by God, the compilation of courage-displaying people. That is the real form of a hero. Because he was “unintentionally chosen” like that, the courage which will be displayed, will be the real one, right? Or, doesn't it surpass the will of God?

Such hero is a hero and is important, but a romantic comedy with cute girls -this is important too. Anyhow, if this thing doesn't exist, Japan will lose its international competitiveness. The main character has to be loved by all the other female characters- because that is the belief of this 21st century author, Noboru Yamaguchi, I want to continue this. I mean, because the characters- generally the heroines- are the instruments of my desire; in short, because I am writing this while in love, I cannot help but to do it. DISGUSTING? Don't talk nonsense! It's common knowledge. With that, that's all for Volume 10!

Noboru Yamaguchi

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ "Mono" is added to sentence ends as a feminine way of emphasis/explaining. It is often short formed to "mon". This sounds very feminine and cute. The author uses it for Saito to emphasize his meekness towards Louise at that time. "Mon" could not be translated into English, and is thus left out.